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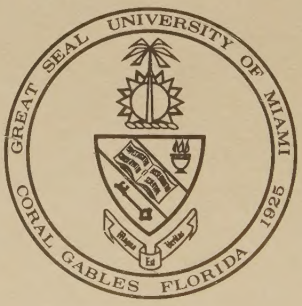

F.W.T. James
Honolulu
May. 1930.

HAMMERSMITH HOY

A BOOK OF MINOR REVELATIONS

Photo. Raphael

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

HAMMERSMITH HOY

A BOOK OF
MINOR REVELATIONS

BY

Sir Ross NIGEL PLAYFAIR

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MOST UNPROFESSIONALLY
I DEDICATE MY SECOND BOOK
TO
MY FIRST WIFE

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Vorbei sind die Kinderspiele
Und alles rollt vorbei—
Das Geld und die Welt und die Zeiten
Und Glauben und Lieb und Treu.

HEINE.

I will not dye of the Pip, so I will not.

MRS. APHRA BEHN.

PREFACE

IF THIS book has any merit, and I am prepared without surprise to learn that it has none, it arises from the fact that it has all been written literally with my own pen, or an even worse one borrowed from a hotel keeper among the mountains of Liechtenstein. And the stories that it contains are true, and few, if any, have been published before. I have to thank my old friend Alistair Tayler for giving me some information that I had forgotten, or never knew, about Paul Rubens, to whom he was a devoted and lifelong companion.

My chronology is probably weak, but I had no notes or documents of any kind to refer to, being no hoarder of such things, and with my fellow chronicler, Mr. William Shakespeare, I do not regard this matter as of much importance.

The whole affair is much too lengthy, but that is the fault of my publishers, to whom otherwise I owe much obligation.

P.S. A Hoy is a small sailing ship capable of carrying a modest freight for a short distance.

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

River House,
Upper Mall,
Hammersmith.

December 1929.

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HAMMERSMITH HOY

A BOOK OF MINOR REVELATIONS

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

I DO NOT really think that any man should begin to write his reminiscences till he has reached the age of three score and ten, and yet here sit I, who am not yet a sexagenarian, and not a little surprised on a rapid research to find that I have spelt the word right at the first attempt (for amongst the many difficulties which assail me when at a too late hour of my life I commence author, the correction of my spelling is only too obviously one of them) trying to do what my conscience tells me should not be done.

This then is the history of a very insignificant man who has lived for half a century, through some fault of chance or temperament, in a backwater, and yet a backwater in which he himself has found some interest, some beauty, some pathos, and no little amusement and perhaps, after all, he can employ some people's idle moments with an account of them. At least, he hopes so.

I was born in Curzon Street, Mayfair, which sounds very grand, but my father lived there not because he was a fashionable member of Society but a physician whose speciality, of dubious utility, was bringing the future members of fashionable Society safely into the world, and this he did with considerable skill and success, though he did not confine himself to this branch of medical science. Before coming to London, and settling down to his practice in Curzon Street, Mayfair, and marrying my mother, who was a

daughter of James Kitson, an iron founder in Leeds, and sister to the liberal politician who afterwards became the first Lord Airedale, he had an adventurous career, having been a surgeon in the Indian Army and as such, living through many of the most exciting moments of the Mutiny. He was present at the relief of Lucknow. After leaving India he held for a short time an appointment at St. Petersburg. His practice in London had considerable variety. He was the inventor, or rather the joint inventor, with a distinguished American physician, of the Playfair-Weir-Mitchell treatment for neurasthenia, which was in those days a very common complaint among Society ladies, with too much money and too little to do with it. It dealt with young females who from cultivating the pose of being fashionably wan, really begin dangerously to wilt, the kind that from the promptings of elegance refused public sustenance and gradually were unable to feed themselves even in private, and from a hopeless craving for they knew not what were in danger of sighing themselves into an early grave. These ladies were removed to a nursing home, and by some treatment of much milk and massage, though I do not know the details, were returned to a world which scarcely required their services, almost rudely rubicund. I remember that it was a rather morbid but early joy of mine, to extract from the bottom drawer of his desk, certain folding photograph frames, discreetly docketed Miss A— B— or even the Duchess of C—, in which the first photograph in a voluminous nightgown, would be a haggard skeleton, with burning eyes and hollow cheeks, and the last, very likely, a stout and healthy virgin with nailed boots and an alpenstock, prepared to walk,

actually to walk, three miles up a Swiss mountain path between tea and wild strawberries and a seven course table d'hôte dinner.

He held, amongst other dignities, the post of physician to the Duchess of Edinburgh and the Duchess of Connaught. I remember going to tea with my sister with the former at Clarence House. We were a little surprised at our reception, for the Duke instead of being in royal robes on a chair of state was sitting on the floor making a lampshade. I remember our conversation or part of it. He said to my sister, 'How far can you walk?' And she replied, 'Oh as far as the Golden Man', our name for the Albert Memorial. 'And who', said he, 'is the Golden Man?' 'Don't you know', replied my sister, 'he's the Queen's husband!'

He paid many visits to the great Queen herself, both at Balmoral and Windsor, for Her Majesty took an overwhelming interest in all the progress of 'interesting events' which occurred, or were to occur, among her innumerable descendants, and I possess several copies of her immortal journal which she presented to him with her name and his inscribed upon the fly-leaf, she rightly considering that no man could ever have too much of a good thing. I remember my father telling me that once he overheard a little whispered conversation between the Queen and her redoubtable attendant Mr. John Brown. The Queen said, 'John, I've forgotten my shawl', and he before fetching it countered with 'Aye, you'll be forgetting your head next'. This remark was graciously accepted in the spirit in which it was offered, as a bright example of Highland humour and good spirits.

Another patient of his was Mrs. Moore, the wife of Mr. Moore of Moore & Burgess. The minstrel, known, I am afraid I have forgotten why, by the nickname of 'Pony', lived in a house in St. John's Wood, approached by a very formidable avenue of large blue glass globes upon brick pedestals. On the occasion of my father's first visit, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. 'Pony' Moore showed true hospitality by ringing the bell and ordering a bottle of champagne and two glasses. Fortified by this modest refreshment, my father said cheerfully, 'Well, Mr. Moore, and what's the matter with your wife?' and was somewhat taken aback to receive the reply, delivered quite testily, 'Damn it, Sir, that's what I'm paying you five guineas for—to find out'.

My father's practice in those early days must have been a large one, and though he worked very hard he must have led a very happy life, enjoying as he did, a long summer holiday, either abroad, or in houses taken in Scotland for the shooting and fishing, both of which he thoroughly enjoyed, though he was no great adept in either. I have inherited his lack of skill but not his power of enjoyment of these sports, which is perhaps fortunate for me, as I have never had the leisure nor the means to indulge in them.

I never, I am sorry to say, felt any serious call to follow in my father's footsteps, nor was I encouraged by him in this direction. It was his ambition that I should go to the bar and eventually be Lord Chancellor, an ambition that was, alas, very early in my career nipped in the bud or at least in a very early blossoming. And upon none of my three sons has his mantle fallen, though perhaps the following little story may prove that a talent for medicine may none the

less be found in a second and even a third generation, even if it be merely the talent of an inspired amateur. I have learned not to despise the amateur in my craft—in fact I will go so far as to say that without amateur acting and the interest and enthusiasm which its practice evokes, the position of the serious theatre in this country would be a great deal lower than it actually is. I hope therefore that any medical man who reads these pages will return the compliment and bring himself to believe that, after all, there may be some merit in the amateur practice of medicine. I say that I hope, but I do not feel very much confidence in the aspiration. Here at any rate is the evidence which I venture to bring forward. A few months ago my schoolboy son returned to his home obviously suffering from considerable discomfort and making no effort whatever to make light of the fact. Well, exercising the hereditary talent I have spoken of, I diagnosed the case at once, without deeming it necessary to call for a second opinion. I will leave it to the dermatologists to give the exact scientific name to the complaint from which his agony arose, but put into straightforward English it was that condition which is engendered and aggravated by the wearing on a hot summer's day of a new pair of grey flannel bags without pants. I decided upon no immediate treatment. 'Give nature her chance' is the clinical motto upon which I have always successfully acted. I sent the youth sternly to his bed, at very little later than his usual hour, and next morning after a leisurely breakfast I visited him to consider what further remedies might suggest themselves. And now mark please how this hereditary talent may descend unto even the fourth generation. Assuming

my best bedside manner I said, 'Well, my boy, and how are we this morning?' And he replied, 'Thank you, father, we are considerably relieved, thanks largely to that admirable and efficacious ointment which I discovered in your cupboard'. Naturally this unexpected reply roused my emotions to fever pitch. Was I on the eve of a new therapeutic discovery? Was a mere amateur to join the ranks of Jenner and Dawson of Penn? As a matter of fact I was. I rushed to the cupboard, opened it with trembling fingers and there, curiously enough, upon the bottom shelf stood a half emptied tin, and on the lid of it was printed 'Finest Meltonian Cream'. I speak of a fourth generation since my grandfather was a doctor in India and his father the Principal of St. Andrews University, and his uncle the Sir Hugh Playfair, vandal or reformer, as you may look at these things, who made St. Andrews into the fashionable watering-place that it now more than ever is.

Sir Hugh Playfair was an enthusiastic golfer. In his day, of course, the Amateur Championship had not been instituted, but you may read in annals of the game that he won what was its forerunner, the principal stroke competition of the year at St. Andrews, in a score of 120! Let us hope, for his good credit, that it was played on a particularly wet and stormy day, when the ball, composed of feathers, could not hold its own against the wind, however adroitly hit.

The Golfing World in those days was a small one, but it took itself seriously as you can see from the excited faces and gestures in the pictures of one of Sir Hugh's great matches, a copy of which hangs in many golf clubs all over the world. And although there was no Championship there were medals and a

medal was a medal and intended to be treated as such. There is in the Royal and Ancient Club at St. Andrews a letter from Queen Adelaide complaining with some severity that the gentleman who had won the medal which she had presented had been seen on the links not wearing it, and at the risk of incurring Her Majesty's displeasure she hopes that this will not occur again!

Oddly enough, I inherit from my Scottish ancestors, though they were never professionally connected with the theatre and would have been horrified at the mere idea, my love of acting and the drama.

I have in my room as I write the portrait of one of them in the character of Lord Duberly in 'The Heir-at-Law' dated 14th August 1812. He was an officer in the John Company and an amateur actor famous throughout India, so much so that the Prince Regent invited him to play Falstaff, which was one of his well-known characters and which his physique enabled him to undertake without padding, at a charity performance at Drury Lane, but he refused to do this as even such a performance in a public theatre he considered would be derogatory!

And Sir Hugh Playfair plumed himself as an actor and had a private theatre in his house at St. Andrews, in which Charles Wyndham made his debut. It was called St. Leonards, and is now the famous girls' school or the centre of it. My father, too, was the leading light of a company of amateur actors in Edinburgh during his student days, and though he could not bring himself to approve my choice of a profession, quite illogically, or so it seemed to me, had a passion for the theatre throughout his life and never missed a 'first night' at the Haymarket or St. James's.

But to return to Curzon Street.

I do not know which was the house that had the honour of sheltering me in my earliest months nor if it still exists, I only know that it was opposite to a small public-house into which Edward Prince of Wales occasionally turned for a morning draught of light ale, the landlord, till my father told him, being ignorant of his client's identity.

I cannot be blamed for remembering no more, for my parents, with an increase of practice and family occurring fortunately together, moved a year later into a large mansion in George Street, Hanover Square, which is now divided into many compartments and has many industries carried on within it.

A year or two ago the basement was occupied by a dealer in antique furniture, and I wandered into it out of idle curiosity and was amazed to see a bell board still existing, and beneath one bell still printed 'Master Nigel's room'.

That basement I remember very well, large but gloomy.

I can recall being invited, with the rest of the family, to a fancy dress ball given by the servants, and the main decoration in the servants' hall which consisted of all our photographs embedded in cotton wool and above them in red lettering, 'God bless them!'

I don't think it likely that at any ball in any basement the like could be found to-day, though I do not flatter my family or myself into thinking that the tribute was paid to anything but convention and the anticipation of our invited descent.

I am conscious that the nature of domestic service has changed, and I rather think that on the whole it has changed for the better, though not perhaps strictly

from the point of view of the mistress of the household. Their accommodation and their wages and their treatment left a great deal to be desired in those Victorian times, but my mother certainly took an unusual interest in them that served her and to this day I meet sometimes witnesses who record their appreciation of the fact.

Only last month travelling to Scotland I met a sleeping-car attendant who told me he had just completed thirty-five years' service, that he had been a footman before that in my father's house and that my mother had got him his present job, through the kind offices of Mr. Geoffrey Plunket-Greene, a younger brother of the famous singer, who was then the Secretary of the London & North Western Railway.

But all our servants were our friends, and many of them stayed with us for what would now seem incredible periods. I remember especially well a stately but somewhat taciturn coachman. When my eldest married sister had her first child, he slightly raised his whip as she entered the carriage for her first convalescent drive and said, 'Well done, Miss'. And that was as long a sentence as I ever heard him speak of his own volition.

My father advanced him some money to start a jobbing business of his own, and his descendants are very much wealthier than I am.

A lady's maid too, I remember, especially because she was a poetess, and poetry is a rare gift among ladies' maids, I fancy.

Much of her output is, like Sappho's, lost, but two lines which concluded an epithalamium to be handed to that same sister on her wedding day with a set of apostle spoons (plated) should, I think, command immortality.

They ran thus:

> And through the years that follow, full happy may you be
> And to him whom thou lovest we wish the same to him.

It would require the eloquence and insight of Professor Gordon to describe for us the internal struggle between the fine frenzy and English love of logic and correctness which must have raged in that young bosom.

And perhaps he would quote it as the first tendency towards 'vers libres' in this country.

Above the basement it was rather an ugly house, architecturally, but my mother succeeded nevertheless in making it look attractive after the fashion of the times, largely influenced of course by the teaching of Willam Morris who, I suppose, was a good decorator of ugly houses, though he certainly managed to spoil his own.

Kelmscott House, which is next door to that in which I now live in the Upper Mall at Hammersmith, must have been a fine example of a stately eighteenth-century villa when he took it, but I fear he was responsible for a good deal of the stained glass and Swiss Cottage effects which spoil its outlines, especially at the back.

Incidentally I may mention that our house was the first private house in London to be lighted by electricity, though for one night only.

I suppose we had a friend who was an electrical engineer. At any rate my parents gave a party which created a great sensation, for in each room and on the staircase were installed vast arc lamps.

It was not altogether a success, for in those days the complexions of the ladies were not assisted to the

extent of standing so blinding an illumination, and they looked rather a jaded collection.

My childhood should have been a very happy one; my family's fortunes were flourishing, we had plenty of gaiety, as gaiety was then understood, large children's parties, but somehow I am afraid that I had not a very appreciative nature, and I was painfully shy and thoroughly convinced of my own unattractiveness, an opinion with which doubtless a good many other people, in so far as they gave so unimportant a matter any attention at all, were in full agreement.

My usual habit when parties were given in our own house was to retire to my bed, confessing to symptoms of digestive disorder. I hope, though I do not remember, that I described them politely and delicately. That can be done, I know, for I remember a well-brushed cousin of mine, with carefully taught and impeccable manners, who really did feel the oncoming of disaster. And what he did was to rise slowly, bow to my mother and say, 'Aunt Emily, I fear I am not very well. Where shall I eject?' He was a Senior Classic afterwards.

I was a plain, awkward, and most unfortunate boy, obsessed with a violent inferiority complex, though that useful if somewhat over-ridden phrase was not yet, I think, invented. I used to spend many of my holidays with my cousin Mrs. Peel, where my companions, to whom I was devoted and still am, were her daughter Miggs and her niece Lucy. We were very fond of strangely composed picnics in a secret hiding place. One of these expeditions was about to set forth when I was called to the drawing-room and bidden to shake hands with a gorgeous personage in full hussar uniform, for some manœuvres were being

held in the neighbourhood. I did so, and in so doing spilt a lukewarm rice pudding over his breeches, and was hurried howling from the room. And this was merely typical of many degrading occurrences in my young life which disturbed the dignity of my betters and caused me to think it would have been much better if I had never been born.

And very often when I was taken to children's parties at other houses, I went and remained in complete terror and depression. Sir W. S. Gilbert and his charming and pretty wife, who is still alive and has lost none of her attractions, were very fond of these functions, and to most children they were undoubtedly and deservedly a cause of endless delight, but frankly not to me. And perhaps this was not altogether to be wondered at. Mr. Gilbert, as he then was, was devoted to little girls, was never so happy as when he was entertaining them and lavish, sometimes over lavish, in his gifts. I remember that to the pretty little Savile Clarke girls he gave life-size dolls, especially cast for them at Madame Tussaud's in their own image. But his affection did not, with some exceptions, extend to little boys, and certainly not to me, for my handsomest present from him was a ball of string.

And he certainly could hardly have expected to ingratiate himself, if he had wanted to do so, by taking me up to Julia Neilson, who was at that particular party his newly discovered favourite, and introducing me to her by saying, 'Here is a boy, Julia, that none of the girls seem to want to dance with'. The more so, since, as a matter of fact, I had given no outward or visible sign of wanting to dance with any of them.

Gilbert frightened me and even rather shocked me.

I recall on one occasion my mother saying to him, 'What are you coming in to our fancy dress ball, Mr. Gilbert?' and he answered, 'I am thinking of appearing as God Almighty'.

I expected that my mother would give him a look which would turn him into a pillar of salt or some other commodity inedible in bulk, but she only smiled a faint disapproval and I am afraid, perhaps I was a terrible little prig, that I never quite respected her moral censorship to the same extent again.

All the same, as the years went on, I grew to like Gilbert, and I think he even began to take a faint interest in me and my doings. At least he was the cause of my first discovering that I was able to express myself.

We were having at our house some *tableaux vivants*, or *posés plastiques* more correctly; a kind of living version of 'Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks'.

Harry Plunket-Greene and his brother Geoffrey were two giant nigger minstrels, Lady Eden, then a famous beauty, was a *débutante*, with my uncle as a Lord-in-Waiting and Mr. Fullerton as Queen Victoria (it sounds very daring!), my father, in a bathing costume, as Marat being murdered in his bath, with the lovely Mrs. John Hare as Charlotte Corday.

My uncle, Sir Lyon Playfair, was, or had been, in the government as Minister of Education, then if I remember rightly called something else and also, for a short time, as Postmaster-General, when he took the opportunity of changing the stamps from blue to red. He had therefore the right costume for the part, and by a coincidence he afterwards played it in earnest, being raised to the Peerage by Mr. Gladstone

and becoming a Lord-in-Waiting under Lord Rosebery. Perhaps if these earlier indiscretions had been discovered he might have been dismissed from his post with ignominy! He was a most attractive man, with a fund of humorous anecdotes, and one of the few men I have ever met who could indulge in long and correct quotations from the poets without bringing an uncomfortable blush to the cheeks of his audience. He was most kind to me as a little boy and we went frequently together to the House of Commons. I am no giant but when I was twelve years old and he about seventy we were the same height, which helped the pleasantness of our companionship. It was thus that I had the never-to-be-forgotten privilege, for as a little boy I was an enthusiastic politician, of hearing that great orator John Bright, a privilege which very few men of my age can have shared. I also heard, but this was a little later, a furious and unforgettable duel between Joseph Chamberlain and Mr. Gladstone, when, if I remember rightly, there was a question as to whether Mr. Dillon had made a heated and rebellious speech before or after the Michelstown affair. This was indeed good fortune, as also was the opportunity I was given in my childhood of hearing both Liszt and Rubenstein play the piano.

Mrs. Hare was, and still is, the most beautiful woman in England, though she was of a very retiring nature and little photographed.

One of the scenes was to be 'The Babes in the Wood'. Gilbert and a very large young lady, Miss Inderwick, the daughter of the famous and suave Divorce Court Q.C., were the babes, and one of my sisters and Molly Hare, daughter of John Hare, both then aged about eight, were to be the wicked robbers.

I was left entirely out of the proceedings, my talents not being supposed to lie in any discoverable direction. I was then, I suppose, about ten. But my sister, though her personality was amusing, could not be taught to move in a rhythmic manner and Gilbert, who took these things with intense seriousness, began to show signs of impatience lengthening into despair. Suddenly with a flood of courage which astonished me even more than everybody else, I said, 'I can do it', and I could and did and was given the exciting rôle. From that moment, though secretly I had my misgivings about Irving and Tree, I knew that *I* was an actor. I am not quite so sure about it now.

The temperament of Gilbert would be an interesting study for the psycho-analyst, but fortunately for my readers I have no real taste for his disturbing pursuits. His reputation for wit I think stands less high to-day than it did during his own lifetime. All the same it was remarkable enough. He was not, however, as I recollect him, a witty conversationalist or even a conversationalist at all. His *bons mots* were impromptu, many of them at least, but they were usually delivered *ex cathedra*, if that expression will serve for a comfortable arm-chair at the head of a very well provided dinner table, and directed almost exclusively to his admirers of the opposite sex.

I will not be drawn into a record of them, for they have mostly been collected and printed, and the best of them he repeated, I think, pretty often.

But two favourites of mine have never, to my knowledge, appeared in print. One was an account, probably invented from beginning to end, of a banquet in New York at which Gilbert found himself seated next to the Chief of the New York Police, who could

not be supposed to shine with an excessive modesty. He described at great length the amazing efficiency of his system to which Gilbert replied, 'Ah, then I suppose burglaries are practically unknown in New York?' 'On the contrary', he said with some indignation, 'we have some of the very finest burglaries in New York.' And the other was a remark he made about Lady Gilbert, an admirable and careful housekeeper. He was found by a friend standing patiently outside the post office in Shanklin. 'Where's your wife?' said the friend. 'In there', said Gilbert, 'tasting the stamps to see if they are fresh.'

Gilbert was a remorseless critic, though he did not relish criticism of himself. I remember two of his pet aversions were the plays of Oscar Wilde, which he considered beneath contempt, and the acting of Irving, which he thought had only merit in its early manifestations.

Self-criticism he was no adept in either. As a fact, curiously enough, successful as he was as a writer of comic opera libretti, to the end of his life he thought himself deprived by the critics of proper recognition as a serious dramatist, though I fear there is little chance of posterity reversing their verdict.

As I have said I was no favourite of his as a small boy, but in my adolescence I frequently enjoyed his hospitality and valued it, even though I was generally asked, as a safe and harmless youth, to walk about with the younger and plainer sister of his reigning (strictly platonic) inamorata, or for some such purpose.

I remember one particular occasion at Grims Dyke when the beautiful Maxine Elliot, then paying her first visit to England, was the star of the party. It

Photo. Thos. Fall

NIGEL PLAYFAIR AS A BEEFEATER, AGED EIGHT

was not altogether a success because her husband, Nat Goodwin, not only appeared in a white yachting cap, to Lady Gilbert's consternation, but worse still, came down provided with a series of breezy anecdotes which he insisted on firing off to the chagrin of Sir William, who was hardly allowed to get a word in.

On this occasion I was fortunate, for my companion, and an altogether charming one, was her younger sister Gertrude. She was forbearing enough to put up with my rather elementary powers of conversation, and we have remained friends to this day.

But I have allowed myself to grow up too quickly, and I must, like Alice in Wonderland, take another bite at the mushroom and shrink into a small boy again.

I cannot imagine that my education can be a subject of general interest, so I will pass over it quickly.

I slipped first through the hands of a delightful German governess, whose name was Miss Fink, known to us all as 'Pinkie', and who could always be tempted to depart from more serious and unattractive topics into a favourite subject with her and us. 'Very well', she would say, 'we will now do myttology.'

Afterwards I attended a small school near Oxford Street known by the resounding and very Victorian title of 'Miss Woodman's Morning Class for the Sons of Gentlemen'. It sounds unbelievable but it is true that one boy, who had transgressed, was publicly reprimanded before the entire school and reminded that, after all, he was only there on sufferance as his father was a chemist!

We sons of gentlemen, of stern gentlemen, seated frock-coated and side-whiskered in almost impene-

trable studies, passed those studies with just a knock and a 'good-morning, papa' answered with a distant if not unfriendly 'humph', and walked across the dangerous traffic of Oxford Street where a light green omnibus with straw upon its floor and a steep ladder to its knife-board might follow another with scarcely an interval of more than five minutes for little boys to cross in 'safety first'. Therefore we went not unattended, even the bravest of us.

Of that school I remember very little, though I still possess a prize or two which I managed to win, with an inscription in Miss Woodman's more than elegant handwriting, and I know that we were taught to bow very politely. And I remember purchasing many bouquets to present blushfully to the entrancing and bustled beauties that instructed us. I wish I had possessed myself of their photographs and preserved them for I have never lost my admiration for the bustle. It was not only a decorative but useful institution for on our way to church we children would balance all our prayer books on my mother's bustle, and she would proceed quite unconscious of her additional burden.

Mrs. Comyns Carr, the mother of Philip Carr, a great friend of mine in those days and still (he is now the Paris Correspondent of the 'Observer'), was an aesthete and would not subscribe to the prevailing fashion but wore an unprotruding skirt. She was a delightful woman but all the same I blush to say that on occasions I felt a little ashamed to be seen talking with her when my friends were about, for sartorial eccentricity they thought, and I agreed with them, could on occasion be carried too far, or ought I to say, not far enough in some directions?

I recall her dress well, and a very pretty dress it would be considered to-day, except for a little pardonable eccentricity in its length. Flattened corrugated pleats, fashioned from some cream-coloured cloth, I ask my lady readers' pardon for my technical inability to describe the affair accurately, but I think they will gather what I mean. But in those days! Pleats where a flying buttress should have been. It was too much for all our self-respect, and there are seasons when modesty can itself be immodest.

Poor Phil at any rate suffered in other ways from his mother's aesthetic leanings. He was an exceedingly picturesque child but picturesqueness does not always make for popularity, at any rate it did not among the rude and vulgar boys who were his companions, and I am afraid that none of us appreciated the fact that the taste of the world was being improved by Philip's lace collars and unshorn ringlets. They were an inspiration to Sir Edward Burne-Jones, whose portrait of Phil as a child is, I think, the best picture of that master, but all the effect it had upon us was to constitute us into a society for reinforcing the truth of the French maxim, 'Il faut souffrir pour être beau'. And a little too much attention was centred upon him by his mother's anxiety for his personal safety and well-being. I wonder if he recalls, as I do, the public reading of a telegram which she sent, after not being told of his health (which was excellent) for at least four whole days. It ran, 'Is my Phil dead?'

And this reminds me of another little story of a too fond parent though it is of a much later date.

My Oxford friend, Hugh Law, sent his son Francis (now himself a married man and a Captain in the Irish Guards) to a preparatory school near Dublin.

Hugh has the tenderest heart, and he told the boy if ever he was in trouble he had only to wire and he would come at once. He was summoned a fortnight later and at great inconvenience caught the Irish Mail. When he arrived at the school, he was a little disconcerted to find Francis playing marbles, and when he asked him what was the matter he was told, 'Oh Father, one of the boys here says that as you're a Nationalist M.P. you can't be a gentleman!'

The telegram about Phil was read at a preparatory school at Margate kept by an industrious and methodical German bachelor called Schimmelmann, who wore a red beard and had altogether a rather terrifying appearance, and to which I was sent at the age of nine. But he was an admirable teacher, though he was inclined to work his pupils a little too hard, and was, like many of his race, a believer in the severest forms of discipline.

I myself was only twice subjected to the rod at his hands, but though I do not think I minded the actual pain particularly, I suffered terribly from the sting of the degradation, and it is no exaggeration to say that though nearly fifty years have passed I feel that degradation still.

I sincerely believe that corporal punishment in all schools should be forbidden by the law. It is more than some sensitive natures can stand.

I consider too that in these instances he did not make the punishment fit the crime, for neither of the crimes were of such a nature that they required to be eradicated from my system, or if the second really did, the punishment singularly failed to effect its purpose. If I remember right the first was given for the terrible offence of allowing a velocipede to 'velo', if that is

the right word, down the green slopes of a hill between Margate and Ramsgate and, not having a mechanical mind and having no idea how it was to be got up, I decided simply to leave it to its fate and the march of progress, and returned to school on my feet just as if I had preferred walking from the beginning to the end of the expedition. Of course since the crime was not discovered for some sixty hours after its commission, and the velocipede had been hired at so much an hour, my failure to report had caused some financial complication.

I must explain, for the benefit of most of my readers, what a velocipede is or was. It was a four-wheeled affair, contemporary with the high bicycle and, though slower, on the whole less alarming to ride. I don't know how anything in the world works, a watch or a steam engine or a motor-car or a pulley so it's no use my pretending. But one sat on a square seat, pushed a couple of wooden affairs rather like skis up and down, and with many groans the thing went forward. Thus did we in the year 1885 learn 'the song of speed'. Our head master, and bless him for that, was a great believer in occasional 'outings' and regularly once a term we went from Margate to Ramsgate, passing in those days through real country, some afoot, some on these velocipedes, rather, if I remember right, the daring few, some of the cockneys by train, and the sons of the sporting gentry astride on mokes. When we arrived we went to the 'Café Royal' by the harbour and ate ices, each boy being limited, by a system of tickets, to six, three strawberry and three vanilla, for Mr. Schimmelmann, like all good Germans, was a believer in good living scientifically regulated by a carefully tabulated study of

vitamins and calories. In the summer term there was an additional expedition to Grove Ferry, where we boated and instead of six ices drank six bottles of ginger-beer. I remember that not being, even at that age, a toper, I used to sell some of my tickets to other boys who regarded a six bottle man as something of an ascetic!

My second punishment was certainly more reasonably earned. We had to rise at seven o'clock, I am not sure that it was not six-thirty, winter and summer, and do an hour's preparation before breakfast. We washed always in cold water and frequently had to break the ice in the jugs and found our sponges in very much of that consistency in which they were when originally taken from the ocean. We were supposed to wear a terribly scratchy and super-Jaegery kind of underwear, the effect of which would scarify a saint. At least so I thought, and I always hid them under my mattress, preferring to wear none at all. Consequently I was always cold and in any case disapproved strongly, as I still do, of any form of mental exertion before breakfast. So I invented a system of walking into the room backwards and sitting down as if I had been there all the time, which enabled me to have another three-quarters of an hour in bed. But alas, I tried it once too often and oh, the difference to me!

But though I disapproved of his punishments I was very happy at Margate, and I found the adventure of school a very exhilarating change from the atmosphere of home life as it was understood in that far away Victorian epoch, for home life was apt to be a little monotonous and lonely. Parents did not mix with their children as nowadays they do. My father was really devoted to us, but both we and he failed

altogether to discover conversational openings, and my mother was busy all day long with social functions.

Schimmelmann's was very different from the average preparatory school: tribute was paid to athletics but work came first, and I do not know that the rule he made that all boys who were in the first class were also *ipso facto* to be in the cricket eleven helped us very much to win our matches against the neighbouring schools—at any rate we never did win them. But it enables me to say with truth that I was in the cricket eleven—I have never achieved any other sort of athletic distinction, except that this year I am Captain of the Stage Golfing Society, and I suppose the most consistently bad golfer that has ever attained to that eminence.

There are many things for which I feel grateful to my German master. I am naturally exceedingly idle, but he taught me at least to believe in work even if I have not always practised my belief. Above all I liked him because, being a German, he spoke of the theatre, which had already become my passion, with becoming seriousness and not, as most of my home elders did, as an outlet for minor sinning, just faintly preferable to the pot-house and the merry-go-round. He was a queer creature—difficult to understand. When he died, prematurely and unexpectedly, he left nothing in the way of cash and securities behind. All his profits, and they must have been considerable, for our living was Spartan in the extreme, he dedicated to the endowment of the school which he had founded. He left the buildings and the land to the assistant masters and matron. They quarrelled, I believe, and sold the lot, though if they had held to

the land they would all, if they were alive, be millionaires almost, for our playing fields are now in the centre of the most fashionable part of Cliftonville. I am proud to possess a letter he wrote to my father just after I left and, as a fact, just before he died: 'Nigel has no scholarship and never will have. But he has character which is better than scholarship and will most certainly come to the top in any career which he chooses.' I thought at the time it was an exceedingly rash prophecy and perhaps it was, but it was a surprising one to come from a man who, except on Sunday evenings, had never done anything but growl at me from behind his red beard. But for his Sunday evenings round the fire in the winter time I loved him. Without reference to any manuscript he told us stories for two hours at a time, and I thought him the greatest story-teller the world could ever have known. And perhaps he was, though as a matter of fact, but I did not then know it, his was an actor's gift rather than a novelist's. For although I think he did not tell us so, all his stories came from the pages of Dumas and Balzac and Dickens which he had committed to a miraculous memory.

At Margate I had as a friend Paul Rubens who, even at the age of eight, played the piano like an angel and could sing songs of his own composition.

It was during the holidays that I developed my passion for the theatre, aided and abetted by a friendly footman in whose company I visited a pit or a gallery almost every night, and during these holidays also I started in company with Paul Rubens and his sister and brothers a career of amateur acting. We had no great discrimination perhaps in our choice of plays, and certainly no 'highbrow' tendencies, for

you must remember that it was before the days of Shaw as dramatist and even before Ibsen had revolutionized the taste of the small serious section of the theatre-going public. No, of necessity our choice fell on the one act farces written (or stolen from the French) by F. Maddison Morton and his like. We bought them at sixpence a copy, and I suppose thought largely of their titles and whether the cast list comprised the right number of males and females that were at our service.

But our parents and uncles and aunts thought our performance nearly as good as we did ourselves, which is saying a great deal, and little suspected the awful danger, as they would have called it had they suspected, of our devoting our future lives to the dangerous service of the theatre.

One thing I am quite certain of—that the anxious delight of playing a part has never appealed to me so vividly as it did in those early days.

I think it was towards the end of my preparatory school life that I determined to become a dramatic author, an ambition that has not been very satisfactorily fulfilled for I have really no gifts in this direction. I started by writing, with Paul Rubens as my composer, a comic opera in two acts entitled 'King Picklegrubber the First or Strange Goings On at Paraboo'. It was modelled, of course, on the works of Mr. Gilbert though it was considerably shorter, and I do not honestly think that it had very much merit. It was never acted but it was printed, and very well printed by a neighbour of ours whose type was ordinarily devoted to descriptions on the outside of paper bags, and at the joint expense of my mother and Mrs. Rubens. I think that fifteen and

eightpence was what it cost them, and the pleasure and pride which it gave us was well worth the money. I do not imagine any copy is still in existence, and in any case there never was a score of the music. That is a pity, for the music was really delightful and to this day I can hum every number with pleasure.

In those days, at least as far as the Christmas holidays were concerned, my whole life was spent with our little company, which consisted of Paul, his two younger brothers Walter and Herbert, his sister Margaret, now Mrs. Jack Burlison, and a girl cousin of hers, Margaret Ladenburg, with an occasional school friend pressed into the service to complete the cast. They lived then in Pembridge Villas and every morning after breakfast I took what seemed, and I suppose was, a long journey in a light green omnibus to join them, returning only in time to go to bed, except on those happy occasions when a particularly black London fog, and they were gloriously and adventurously black in those days, gave me the excuse to stay the night. I am no prejudiced praiser of the years that are past; in fact, I am inclined to think better of the present and better still of the future, but I do regret the half-hearted behaviour of the fog. I could do without one altogether, for in my dangerous profession that would be a great mercy, but if we are to have a fog at all, let it be a really impenetrable one with some real fun and excitement about it. A mere mist with 'visibility poor' performs no useful function of any kind.

Walter was almost as skilled a musician as his brother and could have been as great a success as a composer, and Herbert the youngest played very well too, though his extreme, and sometimes very

amusing shyness, has prevented his putting himself forward in any way. Does he recall, as I do, when he was a very small boy saying to the booking clerk at Queen's Road with a slight and trembling stutter, 'Excuse me, but do you happen to have any tickets left for Charing Cross?' He, alas, is the only one of the three brothers who is still alive. Paul even in those days showed many of the lovable but odd characteristics that distinguished him throughout his too short life. He was constitutionally unable to get out of bed in the mornings. I remember one occasion when I paid him an early visit. His bedroom was under the roof and the roof had sprung a leak and the water was pouring through. All Paul thought it incumbent on him to do in this crisis was to fetch from the hall a large umbrella and go to bed again!

It was still a period when discipline was insisted upon, especially in the matter of breakfast. Both in my house and in the Rubens' mansion there was a strict rule that this meal was to be cleared away at ten o'clock, and that any member of the household who could not descend in time was to go without. I was, and still am, I am glad to say, exceedingly partial to breakfast, and I always managed to enjoy mine, though I should have preferred it a little hotter, at about three minutes before the hour struck. But Paul could not face even this problem, and for many years it was his invariable custom to take tea, bread and butter and marmalade served at 12.30 p.m. by the barmaid at Notting Hill Gate Station. It must have made some inroad upon his pocket money, but that, I think, was very generously bestowed!

CHAPTER II

HARROW

If by chance you are looking in the Harrow School register for the history and whereabouts of some friend of yours whose name happens to be Plimsoll or Plautus, you may, without seeking the information, discover that one 'Nigel Ross Playfair, Newlands '89' was 'formerly at Winchester'. It was an unusual though curiously enough not a unique circumstance, for I have seen the same entry under another boy's name, though I do not know how it happened in his case. Unusual, that is to say, at that or any subsequent period for, at the beginning of the nineteenth century or earlier, it was a perfectly ordinary thing for a boy to be educated at two or even three public schools, and I daresay not at all a bad thing either.

It happened to me in this way. By means of much cramming and much, I fear, very undigested reading of the classics, a very large percentage of the boys at Albion House School succeeded in winning scholarships, and nearly all were made to try. The ambitious parents of Phil Carr, Paul Rubens, and myself chose Winchester, the most fought for of them all. We none of us actually succeeded in gaining scholarships but were each granted a 'nomination', which meant that we had the right to enter a house without regard to the waiting list and, I think, though I am not sure of that, without paying an entrance fee.

There were then nine houses and one nomination for each so that we were among the next nine boys

in merit after the actual scholars, a queer fact considering our rather inconspicuous scholastic success afterwards, and a great tribute to the feeding powers of Mr. Schimmelmann. The house which was chosen for me was Morsheads and I believe I was second on the list of nominees, Phil Carr being the first. I remained at Winchester for a little less than a fortnight my first term, and about three days my second, being then removed by my parents on the kindly advice of Mr. Morshead who considered that I was 'constitutionally unfitted to be a public school boy', though I left the court otherwise without a stain upon my character.

It would, I think, ill become me, with so limited an experience, to criticize a great public school and its system with any severity. All I can say is that personally I found it quite unbearable, and if that is due to the weakness of my character, so much the worse for me. But I think it is true that to certain types of boys, a dormitory and hall without any privacy at all from morning to night is really insupportable. It seemed to be a mixture of hell and a bear-garden, though personally I was never in any way molested or unkindly treated. And Winchester, if it has ever considered the matter at all, has forgiven me for my defection. I am sent its literature like any other 'Old Wykehamist', and I was both amused and gratified last year to receive an invitation to make a speech at the Old Wykehamist dinner. I should rather like to have accepted but I felt a certain delicacy about it. But some day I shall borrow my friend A. P. Herbert's Old Wykehamist tie and wear it for an hour or two among the remote Swiss mountains just to experience what it feels like. After

leaving Winchester I spent the best part of a year under the care of a private tutor, partly in London and partly in the Isle of Wight. But I felt a little lonely and bored, though I passed some very pleasant hours watching John Sargent, who had lately come to London, painting my mother's portrait in the Attic Room of our house in George Street, and I tried to overcome my shyness at the little dances which my elder sisters then held once a week in the same place, listening at any rate with rapture to the experiences of Harry Irving, who was a regular attendant and had just gone upon the stage. But my third great friend at Margate, Norman Thompson, had gone to Harrow, and I went several times to visit him and his reports encouraged me to give a public school another trial if I could. At Harrow, at any rate, a boy could spend a large part of his life in his own society, for every boy had a room, if a very small room, either to himself or with one companion. I discovered through Thompson that a new house was about to be started by Mr. Frank Marshall, a delightful if somewhat eccentric person with aesthetic leanings towards music and the arts, though he had been a great athlete as well. He sympathized with my story and agreed to take me, even in the middle of a term, and though I was by this time more than fifteen years old. I shall always be grateful to him for his extraordinary kindness and forbearance, for a boy who goes to school with a critical mind must always be something of a nuisance. And I spent three very happy if rather undistinguished years at Harrow, though I am afraid, looking back, I was a bit of a prig, or if I want to be more merciful to myself, shall I say prematurely aged, for I always felt

at school that everybody, boys and masters alike, were very young and naive, and that my knowledge of the world was far beyond theirs.

Two pictures remain with me from my first term at Harrow School 'photographically lined on the tablets of the mind, when a yesterday has faded from its page' as W. S. Gilbert sang. The first was of a magnificent creature walking down the hill as I was walking up, wearing silk facings to his evening tail coat (then and now the official garb morning noon and night of the older Harrovian), a white waistcoat, a black silk tie tied in a bow, his umbrella rolled up tightly, a speckled straw instead of a plain, though of the conventional Harrow shape with the elastic behind, his trousers turned up, and walking in the middle of the road instead of on the pavement, in fact, with every outward and visible sign of unassailable greatness. To my horror, with a wave of the hand, he ordered me to stop and bending his head slightly, but only very slightly, for his collar was very high and stiff, he said, 'I know some of your people', and moved majestically onwards without pausing for a reply. Indeed I had no reply to offer and he never spoke to me again, having evidently fulfilled a promise to some indiscreet girl cousin, for my relatives on my mother's side came from Leeds as he did, and considering, as was very true, that he had aroused an emotion in me by the mere gesture which more than met his obligation. And his name was F. S. Jackson, about whom a Harrow song had just been written, 'A Gentleman's a-bowling and down the wickets go' and who, it was whispered, called some of the younger masters by their surnames without the 'Mr.' I believe the other story about him, that when he was

congratulated on his score he replied, 'Well, it will give father a leg-up', is apocryphal. His father was at the time merely a subordinate cabinet minister!

My second picture is in the speech-room and the occasion is a lecture by a famous expert in swordsmanship. In order to show his skill he offered, in variation of the deed of Wilhelm Tell, to cut an apple in half on the head of any boy who would be courageous enough to kneel before him for the purpose. There was no question, I suppose, of any boy in the school lacking the courage, unless indeed it was I, but there was a question of etiquette. Mutely the Head Monitor looked at the Captain of the Eleven as if each were saying 'Pray go first', but before the point could be decided between them, there was a scuffle and a rush from the topmost benches, where the fourth form boys were seated, and before you could say 'knife' a very small, red-headed boy had usurped the position. And that was Winston Churchill. I never knew him at Harrow to speak to and have only met him once since. It was at a supper party and I found myself sitting next to him, and for want of something better to say I mentioned the fact that he and I were at Harrow together. Now Mr. Churchill, whatever his intellectual vigour, looks fully his age, whereas I, perhaps because my intellect has never been too severely strained, at least before I began writing this book, am generally taken, perhaps by way of compliment, to be some years younger than I really am. But evidently he did not think so. He looked me over very critically and exclaimed, 'Really? You must have been a good deal senior to me'. After that all conversation between us completely lapsed. Churchill, I think, never rose much above

the lowest form and left early to go to an army coach. But I remember him as a very plucky and energetic pugilist, and he also had a most remarkable gift of learning Shakespeare by heart. I believe he won a special prize for being able to repeat an entire play word for word without making a single mistake.

But the really brilliant boy of my time as far as scholarship is concerned was Amery, whose future career proves, if it needs proving, that it is a fallacy to suppose that the brilliant boy never turns into the brilliant man. I could of course give instances to the contrary, but that would be unkind.

My own life at Harrow was pleasant, but hardly exciting enough to deserve much record or to interest my readers if I could give it. I did, as a matter of fact, keep a diary all the time that I was there, and though unfortunately I have lost it together with all the letters I received, which I kept in a silk worm's breeding cage after a short-lived interest in natural history had evaporated, I have not forgotten much that was in it. I took but a very mild part in the games that we were ordered to play, and was indeed much keener about lawn-tennis, chiefly because that was a game that was despised; I have never understood why. So much so, that three friends and I surreptitiously hired a court behind a house that was 'to let', and in fear and trembling engaged during the summer evenings in the forbidden pastime.

I suppose in after years our greatest delight is in recalling those things that we did in our youth that we ought not to have done, but I am sorry to say, having a mild nature, my recollections do not furnish me with much material of this kind. Moreover, Mr. Marshall was the kindest and most indulgent of

men. He knew that I was fond of music and, probably risking the disapproval of the higher authorities, he several times, in company with his charming wife, took me up to London concerts and picture galleries. Not, of course, to the theatre, that would be going too far, but once I went with him to hear Mrs. Annie Besant speak, and he agreed with me that, after John Bright, she was our greatest orator. It is almost incredible to think that she is still living and speaking, for to me at any rate she appeared a very old lady then. I remember on one occasion, though theatricals were not possible, arranging a fancy dress ball, strictly, of course, confined to members of the house, and given at three o'clock in the morning—I, the host, being awakened by an alarum clock. The dresses were admirable, some of them home-made and some young heirs to vast estates having actually hired them from Clarkson's, but on the whole it was rather a gloomy experiment in orgies, for, in the first place, excitement very soon gave place to sleepiness, and even the schoolboy appetite is not attuned to gentleman's relish and lemonade in the middle of the night. Also the Lancers and the Sir Roger de Coverley danced without accompaniment, with anything louder than a suppressed giggle being taboo and all conversation carried on in whispers, does not tend to anything like real exhilaration. In about an hour 'God save the Queen' was gently played on the topmost treble of the piano and the party came to an end. But we were not discovered.

Another orgy which I organized was more interesting. One boy in the house, whose name I have forgotten but who is now in all probability a father of a family and a most respectable member of society,

was then in a mood of wishing to clash cymbals in Naxos and worship at the shrine of Bacchus, though I do not think he ever had the opportunity or even any real urge to carry his desires into action. It so happened, however, that in my holidays I had seen in a confectioner's window—I am not at all sure it was not the immortal Buszards—some bottles, outwardly indistinguishable from champagne bottles, but containing a bubbly and syrupy but perfectly 'alcool-frei' liquor called, I do not know why, 'Egnaro' and sold for sixpence a bottle, I suppose 'pour amuser les enfants, petits, petits, petits'. This gave me an idea. I told the youthful Tupman that on my approaching visit to the dentist, I would extract a dozen bottles of champagne from my father's cellar, and that he and I and half a dozen bold fellows would make a real night of it. He must have been a little surprised for I had not previously shown any signs of 'Champagne Charlie being my name', but he willingly acquiesced. Somehow or other I got the bottles into the house, I rather think concealed in a Gladstone bag, and on a wet Saturday afternoon we proceeded to let ourselves go. I confined my attention principally to the sponge-fingers that made up the rest of the feast for, truth to tell, 'Egnaro', though it frothed bravely and its corks popped as noisily from its bottles' neck as from that of the veriest Mumm, was nasty sticky stuff. And I think the other jolly compeers every one, who were in the secret of its composition, mostly poured their libations out of the window, but our dissipated young friend drank glass after glass, and now comes the point of the story, and let psycho-analysts explain it as best they can. He got drunk, gloriously, rolling drunk, with every possible symptom

of that condition, pleasant and unpleasant. We had to carry him to bed, well on the high road to delirium tremens, and dose him with sermons and soda-water to get him into a fit condition to attend supper and prayers two or three hours later. And the next day he said to me, 'Rare good stuff that of your father's, but it's given me a bit of a head all the same. Perhaps I over-did it'. And perhaps I may boast the unique experience of having rescued a fellow-man from the pernicious habit of drinking, before he had even acquired it!

But I suppose my nearest approach to real wickedness at Harrow was to lead a select expedition out of the house in the middle of a midsummer's night, not indeed to visit a London Night Club, for at that date I had never heard of such an institution, even if it existed, but to taste the delights of moonlight bathing in 'Ducker', which as all the world knows is the school open air swimming-pool and a delightful and romantic spot. It is situated across the fields about half a mile from the main school buildings, and just the other side of what was then a very quiet country lane, undisturbed except for an occasional dog-cart or a carriage and pair. It is now infested with a ceaseless procession of motor-cars, so much so that at the moment of writing there is a proposal, for some reason or other opposed by the urban district council, to build a bridge from the football fields to the bathing place, so that, as the head master in a recent speech wittily put it, 'The sons of the idle rich may escape being knocked over by the limousines of the proletariat'. My expedition though carefully pre-considered was not altogether what you might call successful, and determined me to strike out both

burglary and exploration from the list of my future possible professions. For we were observed leaving the house by Mr. Marshall; we were observed and fiercely reprimanded in the water by the caretaker of the bathing-place; we had our names and addresses taken by the local policeman as we ascended the hill, and we were received at the front door by Mr. Marshall in his dressing-gown on our return. Otherwise everything went according to plan. Anybody but Mr. Marshall would have reported our escapade to the head master and I, the ringleader, should certainly not have escaped a whipping. But he, always appreciating romance, merely decided that I should attend 'extra school' which meant, I believe, going to the fourth form room for a couple of hours of a half holiday afternoon, and writing out line after line of Greek or Latin verse under a master's supervision. But I do not know, for in this case there was no extra school. It happened to be Mr. Marshall's own turn to 'take' it, and I feel certain because he thought it a pity that my blameless record should be spoilt, he conveniently but quite deliberately forgot to attend. That was the kind of man he was, bless him!

My main difficulty in writing anything that can be of real or general interest about my life at Harrow is that a sufficiently long period has not elapsed between my being there and the present day, for, to tell the truth, great schools change very little in their habits and customs in a mere forty years—that 'forty years on when afar and asunder parted are those who are singing to-day'. I know the school well still, for I have one son there at present and one has recently left to go to Oxford. The songs are the

same, though there are a few new ones, the rules of deportment are the same, with slight variations, the queer hats are the same. When I was at the school and that is an old reflection, these same hats, modelled on the pancake, had only been invented for some twenty years or so, though they seemed to me to have been in existence for all time. I shall not like to see them disappear though I suppose they may. We wore our Eton jackets and tail-coats more constantly than they do now, the 'bluer', the blue flannel jacket, being only used in holiday time and never in school, except perhaps occasionally in the summer. And that is the most revolutionary change that has occurred. Except, of course, that the country is rapidly receding, and that but for its wise purchase of the fields surrounding it, Harrow School is now almost a part of London. In my day, or so it seemed, with only a couple of hours between 'bills' to play with, one could wander into the primeval forest, meeting not a soul or perhaps Dr. Welldon, the head master, erect and dignified and fierce, upon his black charger. The masters of my day have now all gone; some to Heaven and some into retirement. But those who have retired, when I see them on Speech Day, look to me amazingly young and the same. Certainly Dr. Welldon does, but then I think he was only about thirty when I was at the school. And I cannot myself see the remotest difference between Mr. M. C. Kemp as he then was and now is. And one master, Mr. N. K. Stephen, was actually a master both in my time and that of my son's, a tribute to Harrow, which is certainly the healthiest place in the world.

But my two favourites, other than Mr. Marshall, are now no longer to be numbered with the living.

They were Mr. Bosworth-Smith and Mr. Watson, known to all Harrovians as 'Vanity'. Mr. Bosworth-Smith had that rarest of all gifts, that of finding out the qualities of boys who at first sight would not seem to have any. It was not enough for him that a boy appeared rather backward and dense at ordinary subjects—he would seek out with extraordinary patience those subjects, perhaps quite outside the ordinary curriculum, which that boy *was* interested in, and what is more, give him credit and marks for that outside knowledge to bring him a little more in line with the rest, and give him perhaps a little more pride in himself and a little further belief in his possibilities. It might be with some, like my friend Gerald du Maurier for instance, a keen love of bird-life—he would ask the grammarian what *he* knew about the Tom Tit, and if he knew nothing, for that day at any rate the naturalist would take his seat above the grammarian. And so, though I certainly never told him, he found out that I was in the habit of visiting the Vaughan Library, that I had discovered Lamb and through that discovery had taken to reading the old dramatists, and that was accounted to me a merit. This system of his had its disadvantages, for I would very willingly have stayed in his form for a year, since I really looked forward to every hour I spent in it, but unfortunately he counting such things as a knowledge (a very superficial knowledge I fear) of modern poetry as deserving of marks as Greek grammar, I passed out of his form in one term, though I spent at least two in every other.

Mr. Watson's was an entirely different character, but very interesting and amusing to watch. I don't

think he appreciated my merits, such as they were, very highly, but I certainly appreciated his. He was a very good-looking man, with an unapproachable grand manner. He used to open the proceedings in the morning with a short speech, delivered in a rather high and staccato voice, 'Open Windows. Shut Doors, Jews Vanish, Let Us Pray'. I don't think he was an Anti-Semite, though possibly he thought that the Jews should attend their own schools—at any rate they were not to take part in prayers which did not concern them. And he had a very peculiar but efficacious method of punishment. The offenders were bidden 'to dance attendance on the terrace every morning at seven o'clock till further notice', a much healthier punishment than the silly one of writing out meaningless lines, which I hope, though I do not know, may be now abolished. But it is a punishment which in the orderer requires a very strong and terrifying character. For the point was that none knew if he, Mr. Watson, had really any means of discovering whether the culprit actually did appear on the terrace at seven o'clock or not, that is, half an hour before school was due to begin, and hungry too, for the morning cocoa was only served at seven-fifteen. All I do know is, for I was for some reason once among the culprits, none dreamed of disobeying. And yet, unless he was up a tree, or hidden behind a rhododendron bush, or watching from some distant tower, Mr. Watson himself was never in evidence. My own strong view is that he never left his own house, which was a long way from the terrace, till twenty minutes past seven, but had an intense belief in the power of his own control, which could be safely exercised from a distance.

Yet there is one observance that must by this time have fallen before the advancing tide of democracy, at least my sons tell me that they think it has, and that was the surely very snobbish custom of giving their titles to certain boys at 'bill', the Harrow name for call over, while addressing the commoners by their surnames, and even making use of a form of title which I never have heard except in my day at Harrow. It would be interesting to know the origin of the custom and whether it was ever in being elsewhere, at Eton, for example, or at Winchester. I refer to that anomalous prefix which is usually written 'The Hon.' and is borne by the sons of barons and viscounts, and the younger sons of earls. It is a curious instance of the queer English love of compromise which must be extremely puzzling to foreign students of our habits and customs, that this is a title which must always be seen and not heard, it may be written by the addresser but never the addressed, and its correct use is not always easy for the owners themselves. For example, the wife of the son of a newly made peer recently wrote to my wife, 'The Hon. —— and Mrs. —— have much pleasure, etc.', but they ought to have known better and soon will. It is a title which puzzles the inexperienced playwright who has been known to bring down his curtain with the butler flinging open the door and announcing 'The Honourable James Jobson!' But however effective the curtain, court etiquette is offended thereby. But, as I was about to say, at Harrow, the rule was broken at 'bill' and the young offshoots of noble families were addressed, not indeed *tout long* as 'The Honourable' but for some reason which I cannot fathom as 'Mr.', and if you listened to 'bill' in 1889 and I do not know at

what later dates, you might hear 'Jones?', 'Here Sir', 'Smith?', 'Here Sir', 'Lord Brixton?', 'Here Sir', 'Robinson?', 'Here Sir', 'Mr. Howard?', 'Here Sir', etc. etc. Only the master would pronounce the Lord and the Mister very quickly and breathlessly, as if to say, 'I am obliged to do this but neither you nor anyone else is to think that it makes much impression on me!' It was an odd survival of the days when noble Lords at Oxford wore gold tassels, I suppose, and perhaps soon the titles themselves will follow the tassels into oblivion.

Perhaps indeed these proceedings with regard to what Granville-Barker calls, I think, 'this rather silly and snobbish title' find kinship in some degree with what happened in Austria, and as far as I know in Germany too, where certain ladies and gentlemen were, and perhaps are, entitled to be addressed, on their tombstones at least, as 'Mrs.' or 'Mr.' twice running! I can testify to this, for on my walking-tour holidays I like to become a mute inglorious Algernon Ashton, whose hobby I highly admire and appreciate. In Bregenz I have seen a tablet dedicated to 'the high well-born Mrs. Mrs. Anna Amelia Augusta Elizabeth Alberta Annie, formerly Baroness von and zu Geroldstein and Widow of Mr. Mr. Adolph Ernst Frei-Herr von Wurstheim', etc. etc. Whether this distinction belongs to the rank of Frei-Herr, which roughly answers to our baronet, but only roughly, or whether even more distinguished ladies can be called 'Mrs. Mrs. Mrs.' I don't know, and I should be grateful to anybody who could tell me, and also when this funny notion at Harrow began and ceased, and what it's all about, and who sets all this rubbish going. Anyway, to be called 'Mr. Mr.'

on one's tomb is well worth dying for, and on one's visiting card, if indeed it may be there, as 'The Hon.' may not, almost worth living for. Bennett wrote a play about titles, but I am sure he can't answer either of these conundrums.

Another master of whom I was very fond and who was extraordinarily kind to me was Mr. Lascelles, the Science master and Librarian. We made friends, I need scarcely say, in the Library and not the Laboratory, for my scientific attainments, in spite of the fact that I should have had some hereditary taste for them, as my uncle, then Sir Lyon Playfair, was professor of chemistry at Edinburgh University, were entirely negligible, in fact, I never understood a single word of what was said and was always completely bewildered and bored, except on the happy occasions when an explosion occurred at the wrong moment. But he was an exceedingly broad-minded man and mercifully overlooked my deficiencies in this respect and helped and encouraged me in every way in my general reading. After a time we formed the habit of going long Sunday walks together, and a very odd pair we must have looked for he was seven feet high and very thin and I was five foot nothing and correspondingly fat. We used to go together to Grims Dyke, the very beautiful home of the Gilberts, and one summer he took me with him to Switzerland to stay with Madame Blumenthal, the wife of the composer.

I wish that I could claim for myself something in the nature of a distinguished career at Harrow, but I am afraid it would be very difficult for me to establish any such claim. I did, it is true, on two occasions win the prize for reading aloud, a prize which my

eldest son has also won. I was also in what is known as 'The School XII' who are supposed to be the twelve best singers in the school. How I got into that *galère* has always been a bit of a puzzle to me. If I really had one of the best voices the standard must have been extraordinarily low. But I think I was granted the privilege because I showed myself, though with no proficiency, very keen about the musical life of Harrow, and Mr. Eaton Faning, the music master, appreciated the fact and stretched a point in my favour. My house at any rate won the Madrigal Competition, in which I sang the bass part, and we certainly practised madrigal singing with extraordinary diligence and persistence. I also developed a habit of singing comic songs, and I played a strange instrument called the E flat tenor Saxe-horn in the volunteer band. Wars and rumours of wars being then not at all insistent, the Volunteer Corps, which would now be called the O.T.C., was not, as it now is, quite wrongly I think, compulsory, and was not taken with any excessive seriousness. I joined it, not I am afraid with any patriotic ardour, but because the field days furnished an occasional but very pleasant variation from the monotony of school life. But I soon found that drilling was not my *forte* and that, through some defect of eyesight, I could never hit the target, much less secure a bull's-eye. And so with my great friend of those days, Bruce Hart, the son of Sir Robert Hart of China, who was, and I expect still is, an expert musician, I transferred myself to the band. He could play anything but chose the side drums. My instrument was chosen for me, and I can't say that I am sure that I could ever really what you call 'play it' at all.

Fortunately nothing very much was expected of me. The main music was blared forth by professional musicians. My part was merely to furnish as best I could the 'pom pom, pom pom' in the valses of the day. I cannot write music but perhaps my readers will gather what I mean if I ask them to hum the first few bars of 'The Blue Danube' thus: 'La Da Da Da Da! Pom Pom! Pom Pom! La Da Da Da Da! Pom Pom, Pom Pom!' Well, I was the 'Pom Pom' or as near as may be! And great fun we had, not only at field days. I remember on one of these occasions the mathematical master, who didn't have any particular regard for me, and who was for the day a resplendent major or even colonel, left me with a detachment of two, to either of whom I was entitled to say 'Go and he goeth', for I had risen to the rank of lance-corporal (in the band) and put me in charge of the instruments, the rest of the band being given rifles and instructed to join the combatants. I had strict orders not to leave the instruments till relieved or till I had received further commands. Well, I was only too glad to undertake the duty. It was an exceedingly hot day and I was delighted to watch the battle from beneath the shade of a friendly tree. The mathematical master and temporary major no doubt fought throughout the day with extraordinary courage and skill, and a short interval for luncheon. But the laws of strategy were a little too much for him and he forgot all about the band. Consequently to the intense joy of my comrades and myself he marched the rest of his army to the station and back to Harrow without us. 'Shall we follow them?' said one of the craven privates at my side. 'Never', said I, the example of Nelson, and of the boy who

stood on the burning deck suddenly taking possession of my imagination, 'at least not until the train starts'. It started and then I thought it was perhaps time that discipline might be slightly relaxed. We went to a very cheery inn, had a thorough tuck-in of tea and eggs and bacon, for remember that we had passed the entire day with only our water-bottles and minor rations to depend upon, and caught a later train, arriving at our various houses just before bedtime. It would have been nobler still perhaps if we had spent the night under the stars and within the shelter of the big drum, but, as it was, our decisions and conduct were respected: at least no one dared to say anything in condemnation of them!

The Volunteer band also once a term or so gave concerts at the Harrow Mission in Notting Hill, and these concerts were again among the great excitements and joys of my Harrow life. We marched from the station, Ladbroke Grove, to the Mission, playing for all we were worth, in the night time with the shop windows alight and all the movement of London life around us. And afterwards we sang to the inhabitants Harrow songs in chorus, while I gave them selections from the repertoire of Albert Chevalier. The audiences were very kind and appreciative. I only hope they liked it as much as we did. At any rate *then* I had no doubts, as I suppose no one in Harrow did, that great was their privilege and great indeed should be their gratitude. I am not quite so sure about it now. I suppose the Harrow and Eton and Winchester Missions have performed their good purpose; but is the attitude quite right? the name not just a little condescending? That is a problem which

I leave to wiser minds than mine. I can only repeat that I have my doubts.

The other pleasures of Harrow that I recall were the concerts and lectures that were given on winter evenings in the Speech Room, I mean by outsiders, though our own Harrow Concerts of School Songs and with the School Orchestra I enjoyed immensely too. Particularly I shall never forget the occasion when Henry Irving and Ellen Terry visited us to read 'Macbeth'. Ellen Terry was my idol. I believe that she alone and last among women really was one with the heroines of Shakespeare, though of course Lady Macbeth was very far from being her best part. Also, to my regret, I never saw her at her very best, in her youth when her matchless charm with her wonderful voice together must have been miraculous. I hesitate to talk about Irving, for my praise must seem grudging, but though I do not consider myself a critic, I must be honest with myself and my readers. There is no question at all but that he ranks among England's great men, but that he was in his later days a great actor I cannot bring myself to believe. At one time he must have been, but not when I saw and heard him. Then he strutted and mouthed, and I suppose there was no one brave enough to correct his obvious faults. I listened with respect to those who thought and said otherwise, but I could not help thinking that they belonged to the great company of those people prepared at any time to fall down and worship the Emperor's New Clothes. Certainly on that occasion, as he read 'Macbeth', I thought that the Scotsmen must have elected a very eccentric king with an exceedingly peculiar method of expressing his thoughts.

I left Harrow in the last term of 1891, having risen to the not very dazzling height of the first fifth form. I am very sorry now that I did not stay just one term longer and experience, as I should have done, what it was like to be in the sixth form under Mr. Hallam, and to have some inkling as to what real scholarship meant. But to tell the truth, I felt as many boys of my temperament do, a little too old for the place in some ways. It was not that the discipline irked me, for that was very mild. But, because no doubt I was a hopeless performer, I could raise in myself very little enthusiasm for the games which were then, as now, the staple subject of conversation and interest in the place and, in the conventional sense of the word at any rate, I was no scholar and knew that I never could be. And yet I was really fond of playing games outside the school, and I still think that a little more attention might be paid to the shorn lamb where games are concerned, just as I think a little more attention might be paid to 'Aesthetics' in the case of the ordinary boy who has no natural leanings that way. A boy can go through his public school life, just as men or women even can go through the whole of their life in England, without being made to realize that art in its many manifestations has any importance at all. And this I think is a very great mistake. After all, I suppose the fact that Purcell wrote his music, that Blake and Gainsborough and Augustus John, to put down names at random, painted their pictures, that Marvell and Shelley wrote their poems, that Ben Jonson and Congreve made their plays, does mean something in our social life, yet I believe it to be a fact that many quite 'clever' boys can go through their public

school careers, winning prizes and scholarships, to say nothing of athletic distinctions, without being aware of any of these things. Ask any Harrovian, for example, who are the heroes of his school, men whose glory is reflected upon it. He will tell you of Peel and Sheridan, of Jackson and Maclaren, but I will wager that nine out of ten, masters and boys alike, will not be aware of the fact that Cunninghame Graham, one of our greatest living writers, was a Harrovian, and Spencer Gore who, in spite of his early death, has achieved immortality as a really great painter, was at Harrow too, only about thirty years ago. One of his best pictures was of a Harrow cricket match and should be one of the school's most treasured possessions, but I have never even once heard his name mentioned in Harrow circles, though he belonged to a very famous Harrow family. I remember his father, the brother of the bishop, very well indeed when I was a boy there. For he used to come to the school and to the Harrow Mission and play the banjo. I suppose that was in his case the artistic impulse, which came to fruition in his son, endeavouring to express itself! I believe too that the love of acting, which is innate in most young people, should be very much more made use of and more carefully trained than it was and is. I spoke just now of the reading prizes. There is nothing so useful to a man in after life as to be able to speak clearly and well. But the art of elocution at Harrow, as far as it is taught at all, is taught in the most haphazard way, the teacher and the examiner alike having the most elementary ideas of its rules and qualities. On Speech Day, it is true, scenes from classic plays, English, French, and Greek, are given, but in my

time the acting was confined entirely to the boys in the upper forms. And to be perfectly honest, though it seems to satisfy the audiences and the somewhat complacent masters, they are really quite terribly badly done. I can only recall one exception and that was when part of a play on the subject of 'Byron' was written and produced by a Harrow master, Mr. du Pontet.

Nowadays some semi-private performances are occasionally given. I visited an excellent performance of a revue given in 1926 in a small room and attended by the head master as well as most of the masters and their wives. It was partly written by my eldest son and I must not be tempted into forestalling what I hope may be *his* reminiscences. But he allows me to print one letter in connection with it—and mark please that it is a letter written by one small boy to another.

West Acre,
Harrow-on-the-hill.
March 3 1926.

Giles Playfair, Esq.

Sir,

YOUR REVUE

I cannot undertake the part you are good enough to offer me because

(*a*) It is not long enough.
(*b*) It is not funny.

Faithfully yours,

T. K. WALLS.

The writer is the son of Mr. Tom Walls and certainly looks like inheriting a happy combination of business

capacity and a knowledge of what is a born comedian's due! But the truth of the matter is that the teaching of acting and correct speaking requires very expert knowledge, and the sooner this is realized and an elocution master engaged in every public school the better for that school and for education generally. I think, too, it would be of inestimable advantage if there was a general encouragement of debates, again not to be confined to a few of the bigger boys. I feel, myself, that no boy should leave his school without being able, in so far as in him lies, to stand on his feet and give public expression, clearly and with some style, to such ideas as he may possess. But I fear I may begin to grow tiresome, and I did not start this book with an idea of giving vent to my notions of reform, either in public schools or anywhere else.

I do not think that while at school I had any idea of adopting the stage as a career, but quite unconsciously I went on educating myself in this direction. At home I heard continual conversation about the theatre. My father was not only a 'first-nighter' in London but on his holidays abroad visited the Paris theatres too, and from him and from my mother I heard of the wonderful acting of Bernhardt and Coquelin and a little later on of Duse. Of course like nearly all English people, who suffer from what I have always believed to be a sort of false modesty as far as the Arts are concerned, they believed that French acting and the French theatre was infinitely better than our own. It is not perhaps entirely due to modesty. It is due partly also to the belief that, after all, Art is not altogether a respectable thing, and that on the whole it is better that it should

be practised on our behalf by foreigners, the ultimate destination of whose souls is not quite so important as that of our own.

I went to the theatre on every possible occasion, and I could, but I will refrain, give a catalogue of all the plays that I saw. They included, I am glad and now I am not afraid to say, some of the burlesques in which Nellie Farren and Fred Leslie took part. I say I am not now afraid, because my parents for some reason drew the line at the Gaiety, and my visits there had to be paid in secrecy. I did not actually fib about it, but when I went to see 'Little Jack Sheppard' I went first into the gallery of the theatre where Benson was performing 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' so that I might purchase a programme and leave it in the hall, and that they might take it for granted that it was there that their hopeful son had been! But I must confess that I do not regret the little deception, for Nellie Farren and Fred Leslie were really great artists, and I do not remember their ever uttering a word that could raise a blush in the most innocent. And now that I am about confessing my sins, I must relate yet another deception, though in this Paul Rubens and not I was the instigator. Mrs. Rubens was a very fine pianist and musician, and she naturally wanted her son to share her tastes in classical music. So he and I were frequently sent together to concerts in the St. James's Hall—the 'Monday Pops' were they? Now I, without professing to any great understanding, was and am very fond of 'good' music, but Paul could not, strangely enough, bear it. So after listening to the first item on the programme, he always insisted on our adjourning to the neighbouring hall, where the Moore and Bur-

gess Minstrels, who were very much more to his taste, were performing. And although I have always inclined to the 'high-brow' I managed to enjoy them very much too, though I do not think I should have gone there of my own volition. But we both of us learned, and I have not forgotten, to whistle the enchanting melody of Eugene Stratton's 'The Whistling Coon', and to envy the basso profundo who could go down and down and down to unimaginable depths of basso profundity. But I really learned what little I know about music from the six happy months which I spent in Berlin between Harrow and Oxford. I was sent there to the Tutorial Institution kept by a certain Professor Hamann in the Königin Augusta Strasse, where several young men were studying for diplomacy. But I spent nearly all my time in the pension kept by my beloved old governess, Fräulein Fink. Nearly all her pensionnaires were learning music at the Hoch-Schule, and with no real talents in this direction I became, as it were, one of them, listening to music, talking music from morning to night, with just a very little tennis playing to keep us healthy. I could not pretend to learn the piano or the violin, for my fingers are quite useless members of my composition, and it never occurred to me to ask who was the most distinguished professor in Germany of the E flat tenor saxe-horn, but I remembered the School XII and took private lessons with Professor Schultze in singing. Private of course, because, having no real knowledge of music whatever I could not have passed into the Hoch-Schule itself. Whatever he thought of my voice, Professor Schultze was extremely polite. My suspicions, I think, should have been aroused by the fact that he

omitted altogether the long and tedious exercises which are usually deemed necessary for the training of the singer. Instead we started together a course of the songs of Schubert and Schumann, and I soon was singing 'Ich grolle nicht' at the top of my voice, to my entire satisfaction if not to his. I had not at that age experienced anything in the way of a love tragedy, but I am sure the faithless mistress of my imagination would not long have survived the remorseless scorn which I put into the song. And if it was all a little gruff, somehow, rightly or wrongly, I regarded gruffness as the correct attribute of the terrible word 'grolle'. And although I never became a singer, and I know now that my attempts to sing are and always must have been extremely painful, I certainly do not regret my experience. I do not know any better companions for a country walk than the 'Müller-lieder', though now I prefer infinitely making my friend Mark Raphael sing them to me, or listening to Sir George Henschel, to hearing my own voice even in the solitude of the bath-room.

CHAPTER III

OXFORD

LET ME tell a little true story that may serve to place the Oxford of thirty years ago in correct perspective to the Oxford of to-day. My friend Rosslyn Bruce of Worcester College had his sister Kathleen 'up' for Eights Week. Kathleen was afterwards Lady Scott, the wife of the explorer, and is now Lady Hilton-Young. The exact date of the adventure was perhaps a little later, but it will serve —at any rate she was then about sixteen years old. He took her to see Holman Hunt's picture in the Chapel of Keble College, and they were shown over by a friendly fellow whose name has escaped me, but let us call him a Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman. Kathleen, who was a knowledgeable and inquiring young lady, suddenly said to the guide, 'Let me see, who was it that Holman Hunt married?' and was somewhat surprised to receive no answer but an embarrassed stutter, and to see his cheeks turn from ochre to crimson. She wondered how she had offended, but airily let the situation pass without comment. At a later opportunity Mr. Wilkinson drew Rosslyn on one side and said to him, 'My dear fellow, did you observe the terribly embarrassing circumstance that occurred just now in the chapel? I could hardly tell a young lady that Holman Hunt had married his deceased wife's sister!' I am afraid that nowadays even more outrageous topics are

touched upon between dons and damsels without raising a blush on the cheek of either.

I went to University College in the October term of 1892, chiefly I think because my Harrow friend Bruce Hart had chosen it. There was not then the tremendous competition to enter particular colleges in Oxford that there is now, except perhaps in the case of Magdalen and New College, and provided a man had passed 'Smalls' he could take his choice of all the more popular colleges and of the rest of them without even that qualification. University had been in the past a famous athletic college, head of the river and bristling with 'blues', and became so again towards the end of my stay there, though not through any fault of mine. But when I actually entered it, it was suffering from the effect of two eclipses. A year or two before the whole college had been sent down for participation in some too violent rag, I think a case of a don who had incurred unpopularity being screwed up in his rooms. And just a year or so before I came up University was again disastrously in the limelight, owing to the Master, Dr. Bright, the most charming and inoffensive of men, being shot by a young lady in the stomach. She was the discarded sweetheart of a fellow of the College who had become engaged to the Master's daughter. She came from London to Oxford with the intention of shooting him, but as she could not find him, she determined that her revolver practice was not going to be wasted and let fly at the only man she could find, who happened to be the unfortunate Master. Whether parents thought it likely that more discarded sweethearts of more dons would come up and indulge in more indiscriminate shooting, or whether

they thought that a College which boasted a don with a discarded sweetheart could not after all be a really respectable place I do not know, but for a short time the College was not up to strength. But those that were there were delightful people, and I soon found that I was going thoroughly to enjoy myself for four years, which indeed I proceeded to do.

The first steps that I took were not to find out where the river was and the football fields, and, indeed, nobody troubled to guide me to either place, for there were enough athletes to go round, nor indeed did I make any very spirited inquiries as to the most brilliant lectures to attend. Indeed, I am ashamed to say, although I always was going to a lecture the next day if it wasn't too hot or wasn't raining, I got through my entire Oxford career, passing all my intermediate examinations and taking quite a respectable degree with honours in History, without ever attending a single lecture of any kind. It was very wrong of me, I allow, and perhaps I ought to blame my kind tutor a little. But he was perfectly satisfied to give me a set of lectures to choose from, and after that to see that I brought him a weekly essay on some subject drawn from these lectures. And I believe also that I only went once to the College Chapel, and after the first few days never dined in Hall. All of which is extremely silly and a tale of missed opportunities, and I hope to learn from my son that such a course of life is impossible to-day. But soon after I arrived I found myself elected a member of the Gridiron Club, which was founded, and I think very largely supported, by University men, and it was my invariable custom to take my dinner there.

But I hastened to join the Union and, of course, the O.U.D.S. It is a lasting regret with me that I did not take a greater part in the Union Debates, and try to be elected one of its officers. In fact I do not know of any distinction that I should have enjoyed so much and been so proud of as the presidency of the Union. Had I guided my steps better it might, after all, have been within my grasp, though there were indeed giants in those days, Hilaire Belloc, F. E. Smith, John Simon, Beauchamp, Balcarres (now the Earl of Crawford), Suirdale (now Lord Donoughmore) to name but a few. Smith, Simon, and F. W. Hirst were all at Wadham—which occasioned a wit to remark 'Wadham is the College that all the typical Balliol men come from'. I was by no means a bad speaker, as the standard was, but I was very shy. Also none of my usual friends and companions cared about the Union at all—not that we belonged to the smart set, but the Union was then composed of a small ruling caste, few of whom I knew, at the top, and the rather too mild members of the weaker colleges to make up the majority of the voting strength. So far as I remember only E. G. Hemmerde, who was a little while ago a Labour member of Parliament and is now Recorder of Liverpool, out of the whole of University College, belonged to the Union. Hemmerde indeed attacked it with vigour as he did everything else, including the Diamond Sculls, which he succeeded in winning after much hard work and many attempts. He was also President of the Union, and altogether a very remarkable person. He was always known in the College as 'The Proprietor', I imagine because he was suspected of dictatorial ambitions, to be in fact

to the College what Signor Mussolini afterwards became to Italy. His future career has not, I am afraid, quite kept pace with his ambitions, and for some reason or other which I have completely forgotten and I hope he has, we were never friends. So that though I did address the assembly on one or two occasions, I think I felt the absence of comradeship and something in the nature of a claque. I was once indeed towards the end of my time invited to propose or second a motion, but it was not political as I should have wished it to be. It was one of those rare occasions when the Union for a change devotes itself to a non-political or economic subject. And the terms of the motion were, 'That this house welcomes the "Trilby" boom'. And I was invited because I was supposed, quite erroneously, to have some very special knowledge of the subject. In fact all it meant was this. 'Trilby' had been turned by an American adapter into a play, and was acted as most of my older readers will recall by Sir Herbert Tree. 'Svengali' was a part which Tree made his own, in fact, in my opinion, it was the very best thing which he ever did, so much so that he is, I think, quite irreplaceable, and it is rather unlikely on that account that the play, attractive as it is, will ever be seen in London again. When it was about to be produced there was a frantic search made by everybody for some actress who could at all realize the pictures of 'Trilby' herself, for Du Maurier's drawings of her were by this time familiar to everybody. It so happened that a young lady was living in Oxford called Miss Dorothea Baird. She had played with us in the O.U.D.S., and one or two other performances, and thereby was fired with

ambition to become a professional actress, and at this moment was actually training with Mr. Ben Greet, whose leading man was H. B. Irving, to whom she was afterwards married. Her resemblance to the pictures was quite extraordinary, and one night when Mr. du Maurier was dining with my parents, I told him of her. Tree and he went to some seaside town to see her, and she was engaged for the part, and though Miss Baird was never what one could call a very skilled actress, the charm of her appearance and her voice on the first night of 'Trilby', a character with which, one must remember, all England was at the time violently in love, furnished me, and I think the whole audience, with one of the greatest theatrical thrills I can remember. You will recall the expression 'The Pit rose at him' in accounts of the acting perhaps of Macklin and Edmund Kean. Well, it is in these days a very rare phenomenon, but it certainly was true of that occasion, substituting 'her' for 'him'.

I have digressed from the subject of the Union Debate, and I do not particularly want to return to it for my speech was not a success. My interest in the subject was entirely meretricious, and as I have said my ambitions, never to be realized, were really in quite another direction. I never, for all these reasons, got to know the great guns of the Union, though I have met most of them in later years. The only exception was John Simon, who was then and still remains a friend. We met in the Russell Club, a small debating society which represented the extreme left wing of the Liberal party, to which I am old fashioned enough still to belong. I am afraid their debates, which I did not attend with any great regu-

larity, were rather above my head, for no one is so abstruse and complicated as the very young politician, but to them I at any rate owe that one very pleasant and continued friendship. And at least if I was not a successful politician, I was a very capable prophet, for I never entertained the very smallest doubt of the distinguished career that was in front of John Simon. In fact, I think that I was far more certain than John himself, for although every scholarship and prize fell to him with extraordinary ease, he was a very modest and delightful young man.

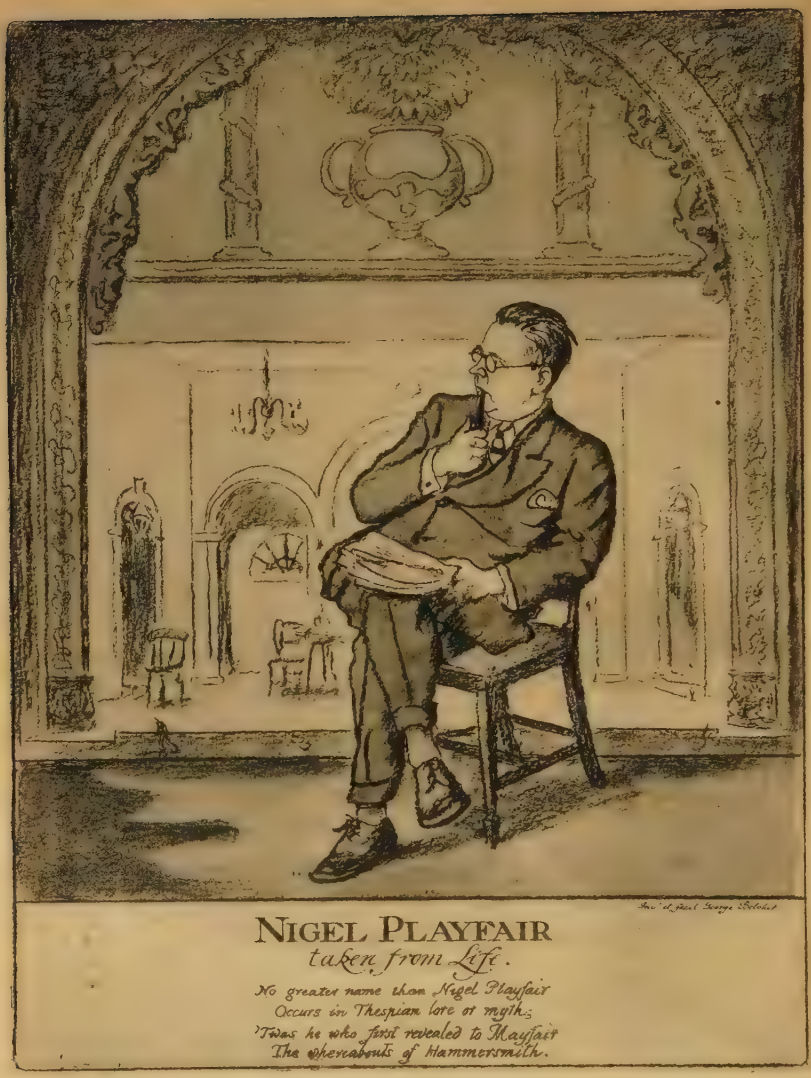
With the O.U.D.S. I was a little more successful, and looking back, Oxford very largely means the O.U.D.S. for me. By the way it was pronounced then as it was written; I do not know when the 'Owds' first began to be spoken of, and I succumb to that pronunciation with considerable distaste. I believe, having read its annals, and having met one of its champions, Alan Mackinnon, with the Old Stagers at Canterbury, of whom more anon, I wrote to its secretary, one Harold Whitaker of Christ Church, on the very first day of my arrival at University. I can remember writing the letter vividly, wondering how much I dared to mention of my career as an amateur actor and my ambitions for the future, so that I could hint at some efficiency without overstepping the bounds of modesty. And to my excitement, I received a letter back by return of post, telling me that the play chosen for the following term was to be 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' and that I was cast for the part of 'Sir Eglamour', the only one, Whitaker added, still vacant. Here was a dilemma indeed! Whitaker had never seen me, and though he is an extremely witty and extremely capable man, he has not

earned his present position—surely one of the most romantic and delightful that anybody could wish for—as head of Barclays Bank in Paris by a meticulous attention to detail. Consequently I am sure he had not before writing taken the trouble to obtain my photograph or secure from the police or otherwise a description of my personal appearance! And 'Sir Eglamour', who, in other words, is Sir Galahad! A perfect Forbes-Robertson part *in petto*. I studied myself in the glass from every angle, but I think in all ages I have been honest with myself as to my limitations, and eventually I wrote and told him politely that the part was hardly suited to me, and again in return he offered me a 'walking-on' part, which I accepted with as good a grace as I could muster. The O.U.D.S. in those days was a most mysterious society or rather was passing through a phase of mystery and almost of complete eclipse. Whitaker, I believe, had been handed the portfolio of secretary (there was no president then) by his predecessor, because he had made a name in the Latin play at Westminster. But when he was secretary he was also, I believe, the only member. There was no local habitation for the O.U.D.S., no rules, no list of members, no entrance fee, and no subscription. A play was to be done each year, a play by Shakespeare or a Greek play, and the secretary was to see to it—that was all. And if it was a Shakespeare play, Alan Mackinnon, who was one of the founders of the O.U.D.S., and devoted his entire life afterwards to the best kind of amateur acting, would come down to produce it. If Whitaker did all his casting on the same principle that he cast me, he was amazingly lucky, for the performance was extremely good.

Certainly Ponsonby, now Under-Secretary for the Dominions, was very funny indeed as 'Launce', which is a part always liable to be overshadowed by his dog. I could at this moment, so great was my enthusiasm, write down the name of every member of the cast, just as I could repeat practically every word of the play by heart, and if this is possible who shall dare to say that amateur acting is always a waste of time?

I will only recall for my readers two episodes. One that the unfortunate young man who was acting one of the two gentlemen was seized after the first night with a nervous breakdown, and his part had to be taken at incredibly short notice by Furze of Trinity, who sat up all night and was word perfect the next day. That is why he is now Bishop of St. Albans and I wonder why the next time I saw him, which was last year, he was lunching all by himself in the refreshment room of the Metropolitan Railway at Hammersmith, which is nowhere near his diocese! I wanted to ask him, but I was afraid he might have forgotten all about his attendant musician. There were four of us, dressed in Clarkson's very worst, with bright yellow curls. I believed in Verona, but I could not quite believe in myself in that costume. But one of our number most emphatically did. His name wild horses won't drag from me, nor do I know what has become of him. Only I know he is no lady-killer now—he may drink and sing but the 'weib' of the trilogy must, I fear, have been banished for ever from his constitution by that last night. It was a cruel practical joke but wonderfully carried out. A note was written to the poor fellow from an imaginary victim of his charms. In it he was bidden—if he

would agree to meet the lady and satisfy to some extent her anguish and despair—to drop a rose upon the floor I think during that exquisite prelude to the second verse of 'Who is Sylvia?' He fell into the trap headlong and alas, poor young man, although really there was no such lady, before the dramatic moment came, every single person on the stage and in the audience knew the secret. He dropped the rose—very daintily and from a right hand elegantly raised above his head. He expected but one response, and that in secret from a love-lorn maiden's heart, seated (within its owner) he knew not where, but rather hoped (being a bit of a snob as well) in the stalls. Instead the gesture was received, almost before it started, with such a yell as had surely never yet been heard within the walls of a theatre. I was standing next to the poor boy, and I thought at first he was going to faint. He rushed from the stage and, as I say, I have never seen or heard of him again. By the way, to make quite sure that they be never accused of the guilty secret, I ought to mention that the second and third musicians were two great friends of mine—one Tayler of University and C. G. Talbot-Ponsonby of Oriel. Tayler went to the Bar with me, but has never practised, and among other good works, if I may call it one, he has been a fellow-director of mine from the beginning at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. Talbot-Ponsonby is now a leading member of the divorce court Bar. He was, before going to Oriel, at Harrow with me, and we lived together during our last year at Oxford, when we both found ourselves in the position of being obliged to live 'out'. Talbot-Ponsonby was always known at Harrow, and I hope the nickname sticks to him, for, unlike many


NIGEL PLAYFAIR
taken from Life.
No greater name than Nigel Playfair
Occurs in Thespian lore or myth;
'Twas he who first revealed to Mayfair
The whereabouts of Hammersmith.

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

BY GEORGE BELCHER

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nicknames, it was really, I think, a witty stroke on the part of its inventor, as 'Jones'—the reason, of course, being that if a man was called Talbot or Ponsonby, it might be borne, but the two hyphened together were more than a self-respecting democracy should be called upon to put up with.

In the next year's performance of 'The Tempest' I was lucky enough to get a part and a good one, that of 'Stephano' the drunken butler—but that, curiously enough, because J. B. Fagan, who had been cast for it, suddenly decided to leave Oxford, and I was given his place. With that part I did manage to make 'a hit'. 'The Times' critic wrote (not the *real* 'Times' critic, for the O.U.D.S. and amateur acting were not taken so seriously in those days, but the local representative), 'I think Shakespeare himself could not but have been pleased with his drunken butler', and I thought that there was nothing more I had to learn about acting. That is the way with the amateur. Now after more than thirty years and a very long and varied experience, I am aware that I still have a very great deal to learn about the most difficult and elusive of all the arts or crafts. The secretary in the year of 'The Tempest' was Bobby Ellis of the Hollies, Wigan, now Major Arthur Ratcliffe-Ellis. He was called 'Bobby', I presume, because his name was Arthur, and everybody knew his address, I do not quite understand why. I suppose there never could have been before and I doubt if there has been since a man so popular in every quarter. He was called by what wasn't his Christian name by everybody, and that at a time when the custom was not nearly so usual as it has since become, and quite half the undergraduates of his day, if they had been asked

who their greatest friend was, would have answered 'Bobby Ellis of Trinity'. Yet he was neither a great athlete nor a distinguished scholar, and a man does not achieve popularity at Oxford as a rule by being a good actor, which he certainly was. That is prima facie merely regarded as an amiable eccentricity which at most is to be accounted to him a merit during one short week of the year. No, the cause of this amazing popularity was merely the charm of his personality. When his life comes to be written, which will not be, I hope, for many years, it will be said of him as Birrell said of Frank Lockwood (I quote very roughly and from memory), 'Men want to know all about him simply because they like him'. Through the influence of Ellis the O.U.D.S. sprung once again into esteem, and all 'the best people' clamoured to join it. As a matter of fact, I did not myself act again for the O.U.D.S., though I continued to do some work on its committee. The following year when 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' was performed, with James Hearn as 'Falstaff' I was away ill, and in my last year, the year, I think, of 'The Taming of the Shrew', I obeyed my father's instructions, and kept away from the theatre altogether. This last year Philip Carr was the secretary, and it was he who turned the O.U.D.S. into a real club, with rooms and subscriptions. Phil Carr was an enthusiast, and also had some of the attributes of a Chancellor of the Exchequer, for he took a lease of premises in George Street, furnished them with considerable luxury, and left future generations of undergraduates to deal with the sordid question of payment, which fortunately they have successfully done!

I must not attempt to deal at all seriously with the history of the O.U.D.S. even during the period when I knew it intimately, because that has been done at great length, though not with too desperate an accuracy, in a large volume written by Alan Mackinnon just before the war. I should not like to leave the subject without recording, however, the impression made upon me by C. B. Fry's appearance as an actor, and as the 'Prince of Morocco' in 'The Merchant of Venice'. I have never heard any two words so completely seize the emotions of a house as his 'Oh Hell'. The rest of his performance was not so good. And also the very remarkable acting of Paul Rubens in a Greek play, which scholars talk of to this day with bated breath. He afterwards confessed to me that he did not understand a single word of what he was talking about, though he learned the actual words with singular accuracy. Paul Rubens had been as a private school boy my greatest friend, and I was more than delighted when a year after I came up and, owing to my recommendation, he appeared at University. In the years after Oxford we drifted a good deal apart, though I stayed with him almost every summer in one or other of the large country houses which he was fond of taking, and we always kept to some extent in touch, and I was never so happy as in his company, as who would not be? He suffered always from very delicate health, and died during the early part of the war. It was because of this, I imagine, that very little has been written about his unique personality, and I think, therefore, I may be forgiven if even at this later date I endeavour to repair the deficiency and devote a few lines entirely to him.

I once overheard a young man, a contemporary of his at Oxford, who was a double 'blue', the Captain of the Varsity Rugby fifteen and the Stroke of the Oxford Boat, declare that he would far sooner be Paul Rubens than himself, and this, to anybody who knows the worship of athleticism in Oxford, far greater thirty years ago than it is to-day, was a remarkable tribute. For Paul Rubens was a German Jew by origin, was no athlete and had a quiet and most unassuming nature, and in spite of his humour had a somewhat sad and depressed outlook on life. But he had a certain charm, quite apart from his musical gifts, which was irresistible in any society.

He was not, strictly speaking, good looking, though he had a certain grace of carriage, and he most deliberately set himself to avoid any 'artiness' in appearance and bearing. In fact, he himself always wished to be taken for a very 'ordinary' young man. It was this wish, I think, that prevented him from working as he ought to have done at his music, and he never really practised piano playing, though his touch was miraculous, or the intricacies of composition, though his airs had an appeal and an originality which survive. He suffered from his earliest years from a delicacy of constitution, and he did not help matters by the life that he led. Not that he was dissipated, far from it, but his habits were odd. He once said, 'I hate going to bed but I love staying there', and, to anyone with my regular life, a visit to him was a curious and rather trying experience. Paul began the day with breakfast about two in the afternoon, and as likely as not dinner, or a meal answering to it, would occur about midnight, and he would sit at the piano half through the rest of the night. And

all the house party, anxious to miss nothing of his company and his entertainment, would begin to follow his example. How he ever managed to get through his output of work was a continual puzzle to me, for no one ever found him doing what would be generally recognized as composition, and everything was written down on envelopes, and those envelopes were never to be found at the right moment. He carried out what he undertook, but always in great stress and at the very last moment. There is a true story of George Edwardes who had commissioned Paul to write him a song and, on the day when by contract the song was due, sent for Paul to play it over to him. Paul arrived with several blank pages of music, sat Edwardes down at a convenient distance, and proceeded to improvise. Edwardes said it was just what he wanted, and Paul put off delivery for a day or two by a suggestion that he would improve some of the harmonies. He then went abroad for a week, and completely forgot his improvisation, and had to do it all over again. Fortunately Edwardes, though he declared that it had been running in his head all the time, noticed no difference, and merely remarked that it reminded him of 'Tolstoy's *Good-bye*, only that it was better'.

I think it was another theatrical magnate who was once playing golf with Paul, and was a little inclined to under-rate his score. At the end of the game he suggested another. To which Paul replied, 'Right—only next time—do you mind bringing an accountant with you?'

I am reminded by Paul's constant companion, A. N. Tayler, of a visit which they paid together to Paris, ostensibly for the purpose of visiting, I don't

know why, the tombs of the French Kings at St. Denis. They went for a week-end, but stayed a fortnight, and then returned to London with the object of their visit unaccomplished. And that was because the tombs could not be seen after four o'clock, and Paul never succeeded in being up in time.

Paul's success as a young man was almost unprecedented, and he was making more than a prime minister's income apparently without any effort, in the early 'twenties. He was sought after by every hostess, for his gifts as a player and singer were wonderful, but after a few years his strange melancholy overcame him, and he refused to see anybody but a few intimate friends and would go nowhere. The war was too much for him altogether, for he was fiercely patriotic, and knowing the Germans well he was obsessed with the fear that they would win the war, and the fact that his health prevented his joining the Army weighed upon him terribly. His recruiting song, 'We don't want to lose you', brought to him, by itself, an immense fortune, every penny of which he handed over to the Red Cross.

There was supposed to be a stringent rule that amateur acting at Oxford should be confined entirely to two performances a year, one in the theatre in the Easter term and a pastoral given in one of the college gardens at Commem., and these performances should be of some recognized English or Greek classic, the English being with very few exceptions Shakespeare. This rule is still in force, but we succeeded somehow or other in breaking it. At any rate we gave a three-nights' performance of Gilbert's 'Pygmalion and Galatea' at the theatre during one Autumn term in aid of a charity, and we played to

packed houses. Charles Croker-King, now a well-known film actor in America, was our 'Pygmalion'. He was a Cheltenham boy, and his father, a most upright retired colonel, but Charles, even before he came to Oxford was stage-struck, and Henry Irving was his prophet. Consequently he wore his hair long and a flowing tie, and suffered most good-naturedly a continuous ragging which was intended to turn him into a normal human being. This it never did. He survived the ragging, continued to wear his hair long, but characteristically when all attempts to reform him had ceased, and he was put up with and even acknowledged to be 'an extraordinarily good chap when you got to know him', he decided to reform *himself*, suddenly appeared with his hair shorn like a German baron's, and bought himself a check suit and a fox terrier! He was, and is still I expect, a whimsical creature. He loved, as I must confess I never did, the 'bohemian' side of stage life. But I did love him, and to hear his anecdotes and experiences, and I hope he won't remain in Hollywood for ever.

Our 'Galatea' was Miss Dorothea Baird, of whom I have already spoken. She had not then quite developed her bewitching beauty; she was passing through a plump period, which has never returned, but she showed more promise of good acting than she ever, I think, achieved. But I think that is often the case with good amateurs; when they get to the very different standards of professional acting they lose heart and sometimes never quite recover. And though I speak entirely without knowledge, I fancy that the professional stage to some extent disillusioned Miss Baird's very sweet and sensitive nature.

And at least, quite apart from the stage, she has lived a most successful and useful life, and her charm has descended in full measure to her children. Again I must beware of retailing a list of names which can be of no general interest, but I must put down that of Miss Margaret Fletcher, whose activities, typical of Oxford at its best, combined playing low comedy and being a leader of the Roman Catholic party, and equally successful she was in both spheres! I adored the part of 'Chrysos', but I think even then I had my doubts as to the real value of the 'poetry' of the play, on which Gilbert set much store, and I fear, in the improved state of modern taste, for it has improved whatever the pessimists may say, it would be somewhat irreverently received. At any rate, even for old times' sake, I shall not risk the experiment at Hammersmith.

But apart from 'Pygmalion' and 'The Tempest' the happiest days by far which I spent at Oxford were in the preparation and performance in Worcester College Gardens of a version made by me of 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass'. I loved the books, and although it is fair to say that it was not Lewis Carroll's opinion, I always have thought that Savile Clarke's version, at least in its presentation, took far too many liberties with the original, and above all I was incensed by the fact that 'Alice' was not dressed in the least like Tenniel's pictures of her. At any rate, I obtained permission from Mr. Dodgson to make my own version. Mr. Dodgson was then in 1894 a very old gentleman, but he was an intimate friend of the Master of Pembroke and his wife, Mrs. Bartholomew Price, whose son had recently married my eldest sister, and I met him fre-

quently at luncheon in the Lodge. He was a queer and in some ways rather a pathetic figure. He kept up to the end his reputation as the friend and mentor of little girls, but he was faithful in his friendships, and did not set about making new ones. Consequently many of his 'little girl friends' were plain and, at least so it seemed to me, rather middle aged females. Poor Mrs. Price, who could deny her friend nothing, used to have a succession of them to stay during term time, and Mr. Dodgson would appear at lunch and at tea, always with the latest toys in his pocket and a packet of pear-drops for their entertainment, and they would always skittishly act the part. But even this did not destroy my hero-worship though any interest which Mr. Dodgson took in *me* was of a very limited nature. Though he gave me permission, and did not at that period pretend that he had not written the books, and that he did not know who 'Lewis Carroll' was, he took no outward interest in the performance, but I heard afterwards from Mrs. Daniel that he occasionally came to the rehearsals, secretly conducted to a secure hiding place behind a rhododendron bush, but even then he made no comments. My version was a very straightforward one, indeed, perhaps I ought not to dignify it with the title of a 'version' at all, for I added no words of my own, but just took the scenes as they were written by him straight from the book. And we were so fortunate as to secure as 'producer', though I don't think the actual word 'producer' was then in use, the services of Miss Rosina Filippi, who, as Mrs. Dowson, was living in Oxford. The enthusiasm of Miss Filippi has never known bounds, and perhaps I have learned more from her how to en-

courage a company of actors to do their best, than from anybody in the world. Again (how difficult it is) I must not enumerate the entire cast. Paul and I were 'Tweedledum' and 'Tweedledee', he deeing it or dumming it with the aid of much stuffing, Suirdale was 'Humpty Dumpty', my sister Audrey the 'cook', Margaret Fletcher the 'Red Queen', Hugh Law (later M.P. for North Donegal) the 'Cheshire Cat' and as mad as some of his family afterwards thought him for daring to be a Nationalist! And Paul and I were also the 'Mad Hatter' and the 'March Hare'. I must have been extraordinarily miscast as the 'Hatter', but I did not think so at the time. And, last, Rachel and Ruth, the daughters of the Provost of Worcester, were 'Alice' and the 'Dormouse'. The performances were given in aid of one of the many charities to which Mrs. Daniel was devoted, and all Oxford attended them. Yet they were outrageously illegal, and just before they began, the Vice-Chancellor announced that no entrance money must be taken. An awkward situation, but Rosina's brain was too quick for the Vice-Chancellor's. 'Very well', she said, 'no money *shall* be taken—everyone may come in free—but a fee, graded according to the seat that has been occupied will be charged to each person for going *out* at the end of the performance.' And this arrangement, most suitable to a production of 'Alice', was actually carried out to everybody's satisfaction!

I speak of the Provost of Worcester, but as a matter of fact Mr. Daniel, though he afterwards became Provost, was at this time the Dean. He lived in a delightful house in the college grounds, which, after he moved to the Lodge, was pulled down to make an

extension of the college. If he had not been too kind to entertain any feelings of the sort towards anybody, and only too anxious to put up with anything that would give interest and amusement to his two pretty and clever children, I feel he must have grown very tired of the sight of me, for his house became to me a second home, and I am afraid that more than once I committed the heinous offence of turning up in time for breakfast. The Dean had many interests, though amateur theatricals was not really one of them. His principal hobby was his private printing press, the merest leaflets from which are now eagerly sought for by collectors, and command large prices in the auction rooms, and many millionaires now fight for our advertisements and programmes of this performance of 'Alice in Wonderland', then so lightly regarded. I did not even trouble to keep any myself, though the other day my friend John Drinkwater most generously presented me with a copy. Mr. Daniel had also a remarkable library and, as an instance of his unworldliness, I remember a young lady staying in the house and about to make a rather complicated journey saying to him, 'I suppose, Mr. Dean, you haven't such a common thing as a Bradshaw in your library', and he replied, 'I have indeed, my dear. I'll fetch it at once. Only be careful not to lose it for it's a first edition!'

Mrs. Daniel was an ardent church worker, never missing morning service at St. Barnabas, a really brilliant painter in water-colours, and an expert bookbinder. As if this was not enough for one woman, she was also an untiring hostess, and made her house the centre for all who were interested in the Arts in any form. She even included the theatre,

but mainly I think because her young daughters were devoted to it, and not from any natural predisposition in its favour. In fact Rachel used to tell a rather wicked story of her mother going to sleep during a performance of 'Hamlet' and, when she woke, and to show that she had not really lost all interest in the proceedings, saying, 'Dear me! I hope I haven't missed much. Has "Yorick" been on yet?' It is small wonder with her varied interests that she occasionally found the need of relaxation, and this she took by the habit of going to sleep for a moment or two even in the middle of conversation. A very great friend that I made at Worcester College was Arthur Hutchinson. He became a journalist, and for many years was the editor of 'The Windsor Magazine'. Incidentally, he was my best man, and died, alas, a year or two ago. Now Arthur Hutchinson was an indefatigable conversationalist, his favourite subject was his magazine, and there was no one to whom he was so devoted, or with whom he was so fond of discussing his plans, as Mrs. Daniel. She was a sympathetic listener, but at least on one occasion fatigue overcame her. Arthur was saying, perhaps for the fortieth time in the afternoon, 'Now what I feel about the Windsor Magazine' when she suddenly woke up and replied, 'The Windsor Magazine? Dear me! does that still go on?'

The Provost has passed away full of years, for he was considerably older than his wife, but I am happy to say that Mrs. Daniel may still reprimand me if I have told the story incorrectly. Rachel was about twelve when she played 'Alice' so perfectly and Ruth, the 'Dormouse', two years younger. The former was entirely devoted to acting, and later played many

parts with the O.U.D.S., eventually marrying one of its heroes, Reggie Lee, now Colonel Lee, D.S.O. Ruth's interests were more literary. It was a year or two later that she edited a magazine, some copies of which I still possess, and I remember her writing to Mr. Seton Merriman, then one of the 'best sellers', telling him that she hoped 'to do for journalism what he was doing for literature!'

In her magazine, among many distinguished contributions, and some not so distinguished, from my own pen for example, appeared that exquisite poem of Laurence Binyon's:

> Oh World be nobler for her sake,
> If she but knew thee, as thou art
> What wrongs are borne
> What ill deeds done,
> In thee, beneath thy daily sun
> Know'st thou not, that her tender heart,
> For grief and very shame would break?
> Oh World, be nobler for her sake.

I write this among the mountains of Liechtenstein, far from any books of reference, so I apologize to Mr. Binyon if I have misquoted him, but perhaps, after all, a poet may be better pleased if one remembers his lines, even inaccurately, after thirty years than if one merely copies them from a book. I hope so at least.

I do not know that I could repeat by heart many other poems that were written in my time at Oxford, though it was a time of much verse making, good, bad, and indifferent. There suddenly comes into my head a little rhyme that for some reason or other has remained with me. I do not know the author, though it may have been Lord Alfred Douglas, and I think

at any rate that it appeared in his Oxford magazine, 'The Spirit Lamp':

Some people love once
Manito's a dunce
He sits in his office
And curses and grunts,
Some people love once.

Some people love twice
The 'Florence' is nice
They give you the choice
Between pudding and ice.
Some people love twice.

Some people love never,
I'd rather be clever
Than rich, or unpleasant
Or dirty, however
Some people love never.

Through my friendship with the Daniels I got to know nearly all the undergraduates at Worcester, in some ways perhaps the most attractive of all the Oxford colleges, and I think it is a great advantage to make the intimate acquaintance of a college other than one's own, especially a college which in ordinary circumstances, one might have known nothing of. For colleges at Oxford have their natural affinities, University, for example, having a traditional friendship for Trinity, Oriel, and B.N.C., while New College, Christ Church, and Magdalen considered themselves on a higher plane, and Exeter, Pembroke, Queen's, and Worcester were even considered by my own as on a lower, heaven knows why! Perhaps all this is changed now, and if so it is a change for the better. But if I liked Worcester, my dear old friend W. J. Morris of Jesus did not, though his prejudice may

have arisen from a much earlier and half forgotten epoch. At any rate, I hope both he and Worcester will forgive my telling the following little anecdote. Morris, I must inform those who are ignorant of the fact, for fifty years may be said to have represented in his own person the love of the theatre and drama in Oxford. He was one of the founders of the O.U.D.S., and has been from his youth and still is, stage struck, though Fate ordained that till his retirement he should be a coach for 'Smalls' and Pass Moderations. But he is an actor, and he looks an actor, with the accent on the second syllable, as in the palmy days it was, and he is never so happy as when pouring forth a torrent of theatrical reminiscences to the members of travelling companies who visit Oxford, or when he is delivering his inimitable imitations and sketches at village entertainments. Oxford could never be the same place, to me at any rate, without Morris. But he does not like Worcester. He lives in a wonderful fifteenth-century Abbey some miles away, though he makes an excuse at least ten times a week to leave his retirement and travel to the town. Now the Abbey is duly haunted and by a very tiresome ghost, who had the habit of knocking at Morris's bedroom door at three o'clock in the morning, before the cock's crow sent him home to roost. For some years Morris suffered in silence, merely pulling the bedclothes over his head with, I am sure, the only right dramatic gesture. But at last he made a lucky shot, or was it an intuitive analysis, and laid the ghost for ever. He thought to himself, 'Where could this ill-mannered fellow have been educated? Surely, and by Gad, at only one poor Institution.' And with all the elocutionary force at his disposal, he cried, 'If

you're a gentleman come in, if you're a Worcester man stay outside', and behold, he stayed outside, and interrupted the dramatic slumbers of W. J. Morris no more. I hope I have made no error in the telling of this tale, for if these unworthy pages find no other reader, I can count at least on Morris.

There was one contemporary of mine who has had more influence upon my work, such as it is, than any other, and his name is Max Beerbohm. I do not even wish that he should read what I have written, for I tremble to think how he would regard my very haphazard style in writing, if style it can be called, with its parentheses and brackets and its words gathered together with no due regard for their order and station. But I do not think that there is really very much danger, for no promiscuous reader, he! The influence I speak of came from Max the writer, and not the man himself. For I only knew him very slightly at Oxford, though our acquaintance has increased and grown into a firmer, if still a rather spasmodic, friendship since. But I have tried, if, I fear, with a good deal less success and working, I must say for myself, in an even more difficult medium, to take example from him in his devotion to style and orderliness and humour and carefulness and attention to detail in my theatrical productions. I think he began writing or at any rate presenting his writing to the public when he had just left Oxford, and I was in my last year. It was at least then, I think, that his 'Defence of Cosmetics' appeared, and a very little later his columns in the 'Daily Mail'. But in his case his reputation as a writer for some reason preceded his appearance. Everyone at Oxford seemed quite certain that what he was going to write,

Photo. Bertram Park

THE FINAL SCENE FROM 'THE DUENNA'

when he chose to write it, would be masterly, and what Max meant to Merton is evidenced by the fact that at the time, and perhaps still, nearly all Merton men modelled their appearance on his and all (somehow) had dark hair, carefully plastered, and pale faces.

There was a legend in Oxford that each term when Max arrived he drove straight to Merton in a ramshackle hansom (it was surely he who said that 'all good hansoms go to Oxford when they die') unbuttoned an immaculate pair of boots, put them away neatly in his cupboard, assumed a pair of pumps, decanted the first of a dozen bottles of good sherry for the entertainment of his intimate friends, and then sat down and waited patiently and without any outward emotion for term to end, when he put on his boots again and drove back to the station. Certainly I never remember seeing him beneath my windows, from which I kept a good look out for any interesting personages that might pass. I surely did see pass on one occasion Lord Alfred Douglas, with a wreath upon his head, and on his feet a pair of patent leather shoes, on his way to the football field, and he played football exceedingly well in spite of his unusual athletic outfit.

But this may have been a dream, I must add hastily, for I do not want that redoubtable witness, and most unfortunate and pugnacious poet, to bring a libel action against me. And whenever I have a happy dream it is of Oxford and all the days I spent there. It is not a dream that once in a restaurant in Queen Street, Alfred Douglas came up to me, complete stranger though I was, and told me that my acting had given him much pleasure. And I am

glad of it, for he is, in my humble opinion, a writer of exquisite poetry and a sensitive critic, whose merits will come to be recognized when his failings, upon which he himself has perhaps dwelt too much, are forgotten. At any rate, I like to recall his kindly action, for I have never seen him again except once in the Law Courts. And how much a little thing like that counts in one's life. I compare it gratefully with one much earlier, when Mrs. Perugini, the daughter of Charles Dickens, came up to me, a shy and awkward boy, standing alone at a children's party, took my arm and said to her companion, 'Here is a little boy who is going to make his mark'. But I didn't, at the moment, in the least believe she meant it.

CHAPTER IV

THE BAR: AN INTERLUDE

I MUST confess that my conscience awoke one evening towards the end of the summer term of 1896, when it realized that I had spent four pleasant but somewhat unprofitable years without doing a stroke of work of any kind. For it was hardly to be appeased with the fact that I had devoted many long hours to the preparation for a profession which, at that date, I had no intention whatever of adopting, nor was it much consolation that I had on several bright mornings taken Dr. Stubbs his charters up the Cherwell in a canoe and invariably gone to sleep over the same passage which occurred on or about the third page of that thick but immortal work. I did indeed, in one summer vacation go to Witney with a reading party, but there my time was fully occupied with a really serious love affair. 'She was a miller's daughter', and she was known to us as 'The Madonna'. For some romantic reason we breathed our love but never our names, and we arranged, at a tearful parting, that for ever and ever after, on every Sunday she should sit alone in the corner of a certain pew and I, it might be in six months, it might be in a year, would escape from the servitude of home ties and worldly affairs, and join her. This was on Friday. I returned home on Saturday, and when the shades of evening fell, I began to grow uneasy, and conveniently remembered that I had left a necessary volume behind, that I

must fetch it at once, for life had now become real and earnest. My parents agreed. Off I went with my bicycle, and slept the night in Oxford, forgetting all about the said volume. At eleven I was in Witney Church, but where was she? Oh treachery, or was it merely Prematurity? But I never tried again.

I considered seriously at one moment the question of an 'Aegrotat', which seemed to be a pathetic and romantic method of obtaining a degree, but unfortunately Oxford air, assisted by a daily before breakfast visit to the swimming pool at Parson's pleasure, a clinical measure which I still persist in and believe to be the greatest cure for all mortal ills, suited my constitution only too well, and even if I could secure a suitable measure of ill-health, I supposed that a certain evidence of industry might be required and difficult to obtain.

I therefore proceeded to invent a quick method of grappling with the examination in the Honours School of Modern History. I decided to forgo altogether the study of the erudite, but lengthy works that were recommended for the purpose, and to obtain in the time at my command a complete knowledge of 'Little Arthur's History of England', coupled with the article on Napoleon in the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica', for European history in the eighteenth century was my special period and that covered at least half of it. So I proceeded to learn them both by heart with pedantic accuracy. And having a very good parrot memory this only took me a few hours. I also possessed, as it were by instinct, what may be called a gossipy knowledge of eighteenth-century literature, and I did know every line of the history plays of Shakespeare. For the rest I trusted

to my imagination, and to be able to lead my examiners' questions astray into paths and woods where I might deal with them in my own fashion. Anyway, though I do not recommend it to the young student, my system worked for me, and I can now proudly write myself B.A., though the suitable opportunity for doing so never has arisen. I am afraid my poor father dreamed of a first class, which perhaps I need scarcely say I did not obtain, though rather to my surprise my name did not appear in the fourth, and he was not appeased by the explanation that my peculiar but efficacious methods of study did not tend in the direction of the former. But at least he was pleased that in spite of a moderate, though sufficient allowance, I came down from Oxford entirely free from debt. I did not think it necessary to explain, what was indeed the fact, that this happy state of things was not so much due to rigid economy on my part, as to my having, though no sportsman, been so clever as to win, a few months before I left, the Derby Sweepstake at the Gridiron Club. And I will here, if I may, relate a curious coincidence, which is none the less true, though it nearly, but not quite, finishes the gambler's luck of one who has never really taken any interest in gambling, or, I am sorry to say, in finance of any kind.

My father most kindly suggested that, before settling down to my attack upon the Woolsack, I might care to see a little of the world, and he presented me with an extra hundred pounds beyond my allowance for this purpose. Very unwisely I decided upon the Riviera for my starting-point. I travelled with my hundred pounds, less the amount of the railway ticket to Nice, and the next day I went to Monte

Carlo, where I promptly proceeded to lose seventy of it in the course of the evening. Returning to Nice I found myself in a railway carriage with a young American, and with no *arrière pensée* whatever, but being a little in need of comfort, I told him of my misfortune. He was a charming and sympathetic fellow, and he said to me that instead of returning, a very hasty prodigal, to London, he would be delighted if I would come with him as his guest on a little tour of Southern Spain and Morocco. He was kind enough to say that it would really be a great boon to him, as he disliked travelling alone and had only his valet as a companion. I accepted with some misgiving, but I found him an altogether charming friend, and I wish very much I could have seen him again. He gave me the name of his club in New York, but I hardly liked to look him up when I went there, after more than thirty years had elapsed! We parted after about six weeks in Mogador, he to return to France while I went on in a small coasting steamer to the Grand Canary, having just enough money left to pay the very moderate amount of the passage money.

I put myself up at the best hotel in Las Palmas, and from there, when it became necessary, I intended to cable to my married sister for funds, as I knew she would not mind a loan to be repaid when convenient and after suitable explanations. And now arises the really rather curious part of this little history. The cable was never sent. For I found in the hall of the hotel a list of entries for another sweep, was it the Cesarewitch? I forget, for I am so ignorant of racing matters that I have no idea what race takes place at which time of the year. Anyway, I paid my pound—

by this time practically the last pound I possessed—for a ticket, and less than a week later I was the happy owner of close upon a hundred. I purchased a prize for a tennis tournament, stayed in the hotel another three weeks, returned to my family with no appearance of needing any fatted calf, and was congratulated heartily by my parents for having made my money last so well!

I have never again taken a ticket for a sweep, for I consider that Fortune has done all that can be reasonably expected of her in this respect, and I have never even mastered the rules of any card game more complicated than Beg-of-my-Neighbour, unless penny poker is that, and playing in a dressing-room during my long wait in 'Fanny's First Play' I once, drawing three cards, achieved a Royal Straight flush, which I possess mounted, signed, and witnessed. There was a full house against me, and I think the betting, with breathless excitement, went to five shillings. But many years later I did have a marvellously successful evening in the Chemin-de-fer rooms at Dieppe. I went into the rooms as is my careful, perhaps too careful, rule with only twenty francs in my pocket, but the luck of the table favouring me, I found myself after an hour's play with quite a mass of disks and notes. I have no idea what they represented, but probably, since it was the year when the exchange was quite ridiculously in our favour, really an inconsiderable amount. But Richard Sickert, the great painter, happened to be standing behind me. He for many years was a frequenter of the rooms, though I believe he never played at all. Half in jest and flushed with triumph I pointed to my pile and said to him, 'If I give you all this will you

paint me a picture?' He agreed, and stuffed the notes and disks into his pocket without looking at them or bothering to count. Curiously enough, for over a year nothing happened, and for a moment I cherished the unworthy suspicion that his artistic temperament had conveniently enabled him to forget his bargain. But eventually the picture arrived, a most happy example of his work, and one of my proudest possessions.

So much for my career as a gambler, and I will leave my readers to extract the moral, if any.

In the Canary Islands, by the way, I started my long and enduring friendship with Colonel C. P. Hawkes, soldier, lawyer, writer, amateur actor, and the most charming of companions, and since I am in that sunny spot in my imagination, I may relate two little adventures that occurred to me. I do not wish to assume too many virtues, but I have at least one, and that is that breakfast, and for choice an English breakfast, is my favourite meal. But here, and for the good reasons that I have stated, it behoved me to be as economical as possible and not at least, on any account, to exceed my *en pension* terms, knowing, as at first I did, that only by my sister's good graces should I be in a position to pay even them. I made friends on the boat with a little family party travelling together, a father and a mother and a very pretty daughter who came from some manufacturing town in the Midlands. On our arrival we agreed to take our meals at the same table. At lunch and dinner we were happy, but my mood at breakfast was rather patient and resigned, and this was due entirely to the fact that while they were enjoying grape fruit, eggs and bacon and marmalade,

I confined myself entirely to tea with rolls and butter and pretended to praise the continental custom, though secretly I consider it is not one of the things which 'they order better in France'. But one morning Mr. —— casually remarked, 'I suppose this is the only hotel abroad where you can eat what you like for breakfast without paying a penny extra'. My abnegation of the principles which I had been professing was so sudden that they would have startled even a modern attorney-general!

My second episode is connected with this same family, and connects me, if rather remotely, with a *tragédie de cœur et de passion*, without which no book of reminiscences should be complete and, though no absolute Joseph, I was, I fear, rather a mild young man. Now the pretty daughter was an accomplished flirt, a species that in these franker days is, I suppose, extinct, though I am sorry to say she did not exercise her gifts in this direction upon me. But she did distinctly have an affair, I am sure a discreetly regulated affair, with a young and extremely handsome curate, which was distinctly very naughty of her, considering that she had left languishing in the Midland manufacturing town a perfectly good and faithful fiancé! Well, though I knew nothing of it till some time later, when she got home the fat was in the fire. Rumours, perhaps even letters, had penetrated to the Midlands, and a scene, the dialogue of which I can only guess at, took place. 'You have been unfaithful to me—here are the proofs. His name, tell me the villain's name!' And to save trouble and a pale young curate's reputation, and because the past circumstances of the breakfasts and dinners fitted, and my reputation did not seem to

matter, she said the Gay Lothario was me, or should it be I? And I should have known nothing of the blemish on my escutcheon had I not received, rather to my surprise, a pressing invitation to visit the Midland home for the week-end from Mamma, 'As I want to tell you something that you ought to know'. In any case I decided to go, for I was always, for reasons which I shall shortly disclose, prepared to take a railway journey anywhere and on the least excuse. I was also quite pleased at the prospect of seeing the pretty young lady again, and of discovering for myself how her virgin charms were maturing. But this was not to be. 'My daughter has gone away for a short holiday', explained Mamma. And we kept up a conversation over indifferent subjects till after dinner. Then over the port and cigars and, to my astonishment, Papa said suddenly, 'Have you noticed a man following you about lately?' I replied that I was unaware of any such attention, and this appeared to give him considerable relief. And then I gathered, as the painful story gradually unfolded itself, that the young man, incensed at my supposed betrayal of his sweetheart into light conduct, if nothing worse, and though I could hardly have looked the Steerforth of his imagination, had determined to rid the world of a rake. Fortunately for me, he was in no immediate hurry, but had sought with many hesitations a convenient place for his justifiable homicide. And so, it had been discovered, with a handy pistol he had followed me from place to place, and was actually beckoned away from a bench behind me in the courts of justice, and was now under restraint! Of the rest of the story I know nothing, for I told them that as far as I was concerned, the episode was at an end,

and I should take no steps. Indeed, I really did not know what steps I could take. I have never seen or heard of any of the parties again. I hope the young man is recovered, and I hope the young lady married and lived happily ever after, but I think, if she was wise, she must have chosen neither the curate, who was really too attractive for safety, nor the gentleman with the pistol, whose attitude was too obviously founded on Othello's for modern domestic felicity.

A friend of mine at Harrow was Jack Rudd, and my cousin, Colonel William Playfair, had made great friends with his father, one of the South African millionaires and a companion of Rhodes, in Capetown. For one or other of these reasons I was asked with my sisters to stay with them in Skye. Jack incidentally had been in the Harrow Cricket Eleven as a fast left hand bowler, a remarkable feat for, through some accident, he had lost for ever as a child the use of his right hand. And he was seldom out for a duck though he went in last.

It was in Skye that my career as a sportsman began and ended. Mr. Rudd senior was an indefatigable host, but with a little too much method for my careless liking. The orders for the day were typed and presented at breakfast, and were unalterable.

On the morrow of my arrival I found myself detailed to shoot rabbits on a small island, it not being considered likely that I was yet experienced enough to go stalking. I was to be dropped by the yacht in the morning and picked up in time for dinner. I inquired casually what the usual 'bag' was, and received the startling information that the last man had disposed of sixty couple—you don't reckon rab-

bits by the brace, I think. I did suggest to Jack that his pretty young wife should join me to help with the excessive supply of sandwiches and while away my spare time, if any, but Jack said the very idea would send his father into a fit. I was Selkirked at about eleven a.m., and it was at once evident that the rabbits had speedily coped with last year's inroad on their population. I considered that an immediate start would look like a childish impatience, and waited till the yacht should be under way. But in underwaying the captain most inconsiderately emitted a hoot, and all the rabbits scattered—like rabbits—the cowards! Although inexperienced, I knew the difference between a rabbit and a stag, and naturally I wasn't going after them, so I sat down to await such time as they should collect themselves. Then I fell asleep, for we had started early. When I awoke it was lunch time, and though all the rabbits were back, I allow nothing to interfere with my punctuality at meals, and after lunch and a pipe I fell asleep again. Then it was tea-time, and though I had no tea, for thermos flasks were not yet invented, I ate an apple and a slab of chocolate. Then at last, as always, I felt at my very best, and arose and shouted, 'Let the Pogrom begin'. I loaded both barrels and fired, but my elevation was a little too elevated. The rabbits scattered and, a little chastened, I said, 'Damn it, Nigel, you were thinking of pheasants'. The sun began to sink; it was now or never, and I took the most careful aim, straight between the shoulders, at one of the enemy sitting by the edge of the burn. I am afraid it was rather a small one, which made my aiming the more difficult, but then all the big ones by this time were really beginning to

respect me and kept out of harm's way. With the utmost sang-froid I pulled the trigger, though perhaps I did close my two eyes a little too soon—because I do so hate bangs. The rabbit gave me one look, as who should say 'And to-morrow's my birthday' and fell into the torrent. I was just going to polish off the other hundred and nineteen, when unfortunately the yacht hove to. 'Well', said Jack, 'where are the corpses?'

'Look in the stream', I said, 'the waterfalls for miles are red with carnage'. Jack picked it out—quite, quite dead, and then I explained that the others must have fallen into their holes. Curiously enough, at the inquest that followed, it was found that the corpse bore no signs of a wound, though I am sure the shots went well in its direction. I could not acquit myself of all blame, but the verdict was 'Found drowned'. Since then I have shot at no other, and I confess that fishing embarrasses me even more.

In justice to an eminent firm, but cast no unjustifiable aspersions on them or me, I ought to mention that the weapon used on this occasion was by Holland & Holland. As a matter of fact, it was lent to me by my father, who had received it as a present from his nephew George, now the second Lord Playfair. Afterwards he gave it to George's son Lyon, a good shot like his father, considering he was likely to appreciate it more than I and perhaps he was right.

Lyon, poor fellow, was killed in the war.

His father is perhaps an odd instance of the freaks of heredity, for my uncle Lyon was a mild man and a bookish, and George was a great hunter before the Lord and a Brigadier-General. But the other day, when I was staying with him, he said a rather curious

thing. He had started the day at nine-thirty with two rounds on the putting links, then drove forty-five miles to inspect some boy scouts—returned at a quarter to eight, presided at a large dinner party, the third running, drank champagne and port, smoked two cigars, played several rubbers, and at midnight settled down to a pipe and a talk. But then he's only just over eighty. And he said to me, this great slayer, 'If I had my life over again, I think I'd just go after them with a camera'.

I passed my Bar examination, again using a system of my own invention, without much difficulty, and became a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple, but I don't think I ever really understood a single word of what it was all about. After that I went for six months as a pupil into the offices of the Great Western Railway's Solicitor at Paddington Station, Mr. Nelson, though I was principally under the supervision of his two assistants, Mr. Bowen and Mr. Mills. And here I thoroughly enjoyed myself. The cases we had to deal with were many of them exciting, and my duties or privileges entailed my attendance at many trials and civil actions all over the country, and listening to great advocates like Sir Edward Carson, of which I never could grow tired. Only it taught me, though my father could never believe it, that my temperament was not suited to the Bar. I could, I felt, have made impassioned speeches, and even in time become a deadly and hated cross-examiner, but I never could, and never should, be able to remember perfectly simple facts. 'What is the name of the case on which you say you rely?' would ask the judge, and I should be obliged to reply, 'Sorry, m'lud, but the name has entirely escaped

me', or 'What is the name of the witness you are about to call?' and I should not only have to say that I had forgotten it, but I should find that I had left my brief in the Underground on the way to the Court. No, this sort of simple embarrassment would become altogether too common, and I should have died of shame in endeavouring to face them.

But, as I say, I was for the moment having a thoroughly enjoyable time. It must be very different now, but then 'petty cash' was most generously provided, and one was expected to do oneself exceedingly well at all the best hotels. Moreover, and that was a vivid joy, I had a first-class pass all over the Great Western Railway system, and by asking, could always obtain a ticket to anywhere on any other line, even as far as Paris. It was a delightful thing, at least I thought and should still think so, to arrive at Paddington at ten o'clock and for Mr. Bowen to say 'Oh, Playfair, just go to Monmouth and ask Mr. Jones why he hasn't answered my letter, and then go to Swansea and bring back all the papers in the Bloxam case'. And I thought nothing of accepting an invitation to a dance in Inverness. When the six months were over, and I returned to third-class journeys, I felt it a very real grievance.

I do not recall the details of any of the cases with which we had to deal, though some of them were very peculiar. The most interesting were those in which passengers in railway accidents alleged that their whole life had been marred by nervous shocks, and came to the Court trembling and unable to walk, and then evidence was brought forward that they had eaten Christmas dinners, the life and soul of the party, or even played in tennis tournaments between

the accident and the trial of the action, and I remember one case in which a respected season ticket holder, Freud alone knows why, had found himself alone with a wretched little boy returning all unwillingly to school, and had not only painted his face black, but with spirit of gum and crêpe hair, had fitted him with a full beard and moustache! But in this case 'we' pacified the indignant parents, and very wisely avoided a prosecution!! Had we not, perhaps even more than Freud, we should have called my friend Frank Richardson, who about then was beginning his whimsical whisker crusade, as an expert witness.

From Paddington I entered the chambers of the delightful Alfred Lyttelton, with whom I passed a year, and oddly enough it was he (for with his brilliant wife he had a great love of all that was best in the theatre) who suggested to me that it would be wise for me to devote my talents, such as they were, to the service of the drama. For he sympathized with me, even if he could not understand, when he realized that though I tried quite hard, my mind could not grapple with the humblest problems of drafting and other legal forms and ceremonies. I had with me, as a fellow pupil, a young man who had already been a great friend of mine at Oxford, P. F. Warner, and he found the whole business just as difficult as I did, and wisely sought a more suitable field for his activities. When we were tired of reading the briefs in his chambers, and there was nothing doing in the Law Courts, Alfred Lyttelton would send us to the library to solve knotty points of law whose solution he kindly pretended would be of great service to him. Once, in a mischievous mood, he said to 'Plum': 'I

know that the penalty for attempted suicide is so and so, but do, like a good fellow, find out for me what the penalty is for the full offence', and this Warner most diligently set out to do.

After my year was over, it was time for me to begin in earnest, and I was lucky enough to be given a chair in the chambers of Mr. Hutton, who afterwards became a police magistrate, and whom I had made friends with on a summer holiday in France. And here briefs, if they did not pour in, actually began to arrive. I still have my brief book, and in the one year that I practised at the bar, I find that I actually netted no less than seventy pounds. I use the word 'netted' as a compromise for I dare not say 'earned', since all the pleadings I drew—I think that is the correct phrase—had to be done for me by my friends, for I simply could not grasp the tiresome method. And once on Hutton's behalf I defended a youth who had committed some outrage. I was instructed that the only hope was to suggest that he was not 'all there'. I called his mother, and I said to her, an unfortunate way of putting it as it turned out, 'Have you ever noticed anything wrong with your son's head?' and she, only too anxious to oblige, answered, 'Yes, sir, I 'ave. One morning it will be quite all right, and the next his 'at'll 'ardly go on 'im'. (Laughter in Court, in which I was far too dignified to join.)

And I was briefed by Mr. Russell Cooke as an extra and quite unnecessary junior in an election petition. When at long length it was over in addition to a nominal (but very welcome) fee of ten guineas he presented me as a reward for my valuable, if silent and unobtrusive services, with a small theatrical

library which he had collected, a kind but, I am afraid, a rather significant gesture. It contained several of the earliest works of Bernard Shaw, which I still retain as an eventual barrier against complete penury, so the gift was distinctly more valuable than it appeared, and I have forgiven him the little satirical impulse that may have prompted it!

All this time, with my friend Paul, who also studied for the bar, though I am not sure that he was ever called, for passing examinations was not his *forte*, I think he never even got through 'Divvers' at Oxford, and others, I continued my amateur acting, sometimes in London, sometimes in country houses.

Our favourite plays were 'A Pantomime Rehearsal' and Weedon Grossmith's 'A Commission', and two of our favourite leading ladies, then, like ourselves, amateurs, were Miss Mabel Terry Lewis and Miss Lilian Braithwaite, and also, by far the cleverest amateur actress I have ever met, Miss Margaret Gordon, now Lady Stanley of Alderley. In fact, our happiest performances were given at Ightam, in the little village hall, near which her parents and her sisters lived, and which, in our eyes at any rate, became for the time the Salzburg of the home counties! And once or twice we engaged Mr. Ben Webster, the kindest and best of coaches, to be our 'producer' for a fee I think of five guineas a time, and I learned a great deal of what I know from him. My parents did not much approve even of these exploits, though they acknowledged fully our amazing genius, and I once overheard my poor mother telling a friend that possibly Coquelin was a better actor than I, but certainly no one else. I hate to have to say it, but I have met several since, and even at the time I made

an unwilling reservation in my own mind in favour of Charles Wyndham, whom I then considered and still do, within his definite limitations, far and away the greatest actor of that period.

A catalogue of amateur acting achievements would be a dreary thing to record, even for myself, and most certainly for my readers, and even then I think I, at any rate, considered that amateur acting was a delightful occasional pastime but a grave mistake as an obsession. But I may say a word as to the best of all amateur acting companies, of both of which I was a member, 'The Old Stagers' and 'The Windsor Strollers'. Both had more or less the same members, and from their ranks have sprung many good professional actors, Arthur Bourchier and W. G. Elliott, for example, as well as others who chose less conspicuous careers as cabinet ministers and judges. I was invited to Canterbury and to the fellowship of the 'Old Stagers', who had just then celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of their foundation, and one of whose members then still active, Sir Spencer Ponsonby-Fane, had actually taken part in the first performance, by an old family friend Mr. Quintin Twiss, in the less serious moments of his life a Treasury official. It was of Quintin Twiss, that Sir W. S. Gilbert rather wickedly said: 'I have known Twiss for fifty years, and all that time he has been just *going* to say something funny.' But after all 'saying something funny' can be a boring and dangerous pursuit, and indeed to repeat with effect the sayings of people whom in one's modesty one may consider funnier than oneself, may be even more meritorious, and no one could do that with more inimitable effect than Twiss, and he was, without question, himself a

modest, simple-minded, and delightful creature. And if amateur acting is worth doing at all it is worth doing well, and Twiss was determined to do it as well as in him lay. I do know that for many years he devoted the first week of his annual holiday, Canterbury Cricket Week being the second, to going entirely by himself to some country village or seaside town, and there practising voice production and gesture for hours at a stretch. Our professional actors and actresses might very well profit by his example, but I fear very few of them do or will. Twiss had seen me act in some drawing-room, and I became his protégé. He helped me for all he knew in the part with which I was entrusted, and which happened to be rather a good one, owing to certain unexpected vacancies, and stood at the wings beaming with pleasure when I seemed to be acquitting myself well, and drawing the requisite laughter and applause from what is, after Oxford, perhaps the easiest and best audience in the world. In my second year, for a two years' 'apprenticeship' is a rule of the Society, I was duly elected an 'Old Stager', and descended to the dining-room of 'The Fountain', a Zingari riband across my chest, in the manner of the Order of the Bath, to assist at the banquet. I shall never forget his radiant face as he opened my bedroom door to acquaint me with the fact; and I, standing there dressed for the part, in answer to a mysterious hint of 'in case', was obliged, wretched little cynic that I was, to bring all my acting powers to bear to show a trembling surprise and gratification! Other members, besides my Oxford contemporaries and friends, Bobby Ellis and Percy Lee, now an official in the House of Lords and of all my amateur friends the

one who I am quite certain would have come to the very top had he chosen to adopt the stage as a profession, Harold Whitaker and Alan Mackinnon, were General Sir Henry de Bathe and Charles Drummond, the banker. Now Sir Henry was perhaps the handsomest man I have ever seen, and Drummond, though large, was inclined to be plain, and his chin tended to be recurrent. He was cast for the part of a military man and, Clarkson in attendance, he sat down in his dressing-room as it might be at his barber's, and said: 'Clarkson, make me up exactly like Sir Henry de Bathe', and Clarkson, conscious of his infallibility, said, 'Certainly', and did so to their mutual satisfaction. And to show my extreme individuality as a writer of theatrical reminiscences, I will tell no more stories about Clarkson, whose immortality has been long assured. Except indeed, for resolutions are made to be broken, an occasion flashes across my mind of a week-end I spent in a Margate hotel, when I observed among the guests (mostly of the chosen race) on Sunday morning an unmistakable unrest and seething excitement, a whispering from one to another, 'He's coming, I assure you, I heard it on the best authority'. Being a placid person, I did not at first move myself from my 'Sunday Times' and my chair, but at last excitement became too intense, the murmuring grew into a cheer, I joined the excited crowd without the porch, and at last, there emerged from the station bus, not, as by this time I was anticipating, Lord Wolseley, Henry Irving or the Prince of Wales, but Willie Clarkson!

I acted only in one or two years for both the 'Old Stagers' and the 'Windsor Strollers', whose bright particular star was the clever and ever youthful Lady

Crutchley, whom I had seen first as 'Patience' in Gilbert's drawing-room, with the entire professional company supporting her, and doing the part extremely well I thought. For not long after I took the decisive step, which disqualified me from active membership. I have not seen their performances lately, but from all reports they are extremely good, having passed through a period successfully when they were inclined to sacrifice good acting to mere social prestige and good fellowship.

At Canterbury, in distinction to Windsor, the actresses were always professional, though this very admirable rule, I am sorry to say, has long been broken. Very few of our leading actresses have not had an experience of the Cricket Week, and I had the happiness of making there one of my most valued friendships, that with Mabel Beardsley, the sister of Aubrey. She had a genius for friendship, which is a better thing than a genius for acting, and that, to be honest, she certainly had not. To the end of her too short life, for she died very young and very bravely, I was privileged to join her circle, and a very great privilege it was, and to this day there are many people, now becoming elderly, who when they meet say proudly to one another, 'You and I were friends of Mabel's'. And yet they would be puzzled to say, for beauty and wit are not enough, exactly what the qualities were that made her irresistible.

I found, in spite of these activities, that time hung a little heavily upon my hands, for I was never very comfortably a dance-goer or a diner-out, and my chamber work I am afraid was becoming more and more a pretence, and a mere pretext not to upset my relations with my father. One of my pastimes

was a too persistent reading of 'The Times', including all the advertisements, under a guise of an intensive study of the law reports.

I gave myself some pleasure by trying to write verses, though I am no poet, and I was so fortunate as to have them taken, and what is more paid for, by the green 'Westminster Gazette', whose demise I still mourn, for nothing, grateful as I am every night of my life in bed to the 'Evening Standard', has quite taken its place in my affections. And I did win a very substantial money prize in 'The Academy' for a series of translations of Heine's poems. I don't think they were very good, but perhaps something of my love and admiration for Heine did come through. Perhaps I'll transcribe one of them, just one, for it's the only chance, I'm afraid, of the poor things ever being reprinted, though, probably quite unjustifiably, I have often hoped that they might creep into an anthology of translations. And, oddly enough, just as I write these words, at Gaflei, in Liechtenstein, five 'pedestrians' drinking beer at the next table, begin talking about Heine's 'Lieder'! Here it is, at any rate, for you to skip, and if you are like me, you nearly always skip the quotations in a book, especially if they are in verse:

Untravelled and unchanging
  The stars in heaven above
Through all eternity reflect
  The agony of love.

And though they speak a language
  Of matchless eloquence,
No dull grammarian may hope
  To learn its accidence.

But I have solved for ever
The secret of the skies;
My lexicon the lovelight
In my beloved's eyes.

And now, why shouldn't I? I will let myself go, and transcribe one of my 'poems' from the green 'Westminster' with the excuse perhaps that it is very typical of its extremely sentimental and simple period.

Just as I saw you at the ball last night,
Brave in the gaudy colours of old Spain,
Red rose, black hair, plump shoulders baby-white,
So I shall love to picture you again
For memory's solace and my soul's delight:
There, in a gallery of visions, deign,
Fairest and undisputed Queen, to reign
Till the poor connoisseur has taken flight.
Sweet Andalusian, I might almost swear
That gipsy garb with such a native grace
No daughter of the chilly north could wear,
Nor that red rose set off an English face,
But that I caught beneath the mask's disguise
A glimpse of English April in your eyes!

My father's only comment on this production was that he could not make head or tail of it, but it seemed rather improper, and I fancy, that for the moment he thought he had given birth to another Algernon Charles, stouter and less flamboyant, but equally vicious! As a matter of fact, did he but know it, it was a highly fanciful picture of my usual behaviour at the elegant *soirées dansantes* which I attended, for I was liable to spend my time as a rule, smoking cigarettes in an adjacent shrubbery:

(*a*) Because I was always looked upon by some chaperon as a likely victim for her plain débutante daughter who wore pince-nez, or

(*b*) Because I required a convenient place to kick myself for allowing Percy Lee or Harold Whitaker to get off first (as they always did) with the girl who made eyes or held hands 'for so very little longer' in the Ladies' Chain.

And here conveniently, but shortly, let me refer, for why should Mr. George Moore have it all his own way, to my *vie amoureuse*? Philip Carr and I (may our wives learn in time to forgive us) were constant companions in 'the Quest of the Golden Girl'. Richard le Gallienne's book with that title had just thrilled London. ('Twas I, Richard le Gallienne, who told you so. I ought to know.') Our happy hunting ground was the Earl's Court Exhibition, and many an entrancing female would have been our quarry, only unfortunately she was always accompanied by some horrid and hefty male, and those that were not were never to our taste. Phil, ever an optimist, always said bravely, 'Never mind. She'll leave him', but somehow she never did. But one year there was an entrancing exhibition of the 'Beauties of all Nations', and we fell in love at first sight with the whole bunch of 'Beauties from Buda-Pest'. With amazing daring and in admirable German, I asked the lot to luncheon next day at twelve o'clock (having regard to the time of opening of the exhibition) at Frascati's, and before they could reply, I was pounced upon by a uniformed chaperon who damned me as a disgrace to civilization and the British Isles, and informed me that they were all perfect ladies and unused to such caddish behaviour. The next day we repaired to Frascati's at the appointed hour but without much hope, when suddenly a four-wheeler arrived, and out of it they poured, but not

quite so beautiful as they had looked in their appropriate setting and scenery. The luncheon was a moderate success only, and for three months afterwards mine consisted exclusively of a poached egg on toast and stewed prunes at the local Lyons.

And once, but that was a little later, I chivalrously invited a young lady who was unhappy at home, to fly with me, and one morning she actually turned up at Gray's Inn with that intention, or at any rate to discuss its possibilities. Unfortunately she chose a very early hour, and I was a late riser, and before I had succeeded in becoming thoroughly awake, she had thought better of it, and returned to domesticity. And that is that.

My poetical effusions numbered some fifty or sixty in all, so I have let you off lightly. When the afflatus had subsided and I regarded them in bulk, I decided against poetry as a permanent profession. For one thing I doubted if it was really my *métier*, and then the payment was hardly adequate for my needs. Moreover, poets in England were not then being very well treated, and I did not sigh for martyrdom. In France it was different, if I may judge from a little poem which a French governess had taught me to recite, with appropriate gestures, in my early childhood:

Enfants tournez un peu la tête
Vers cet homme silencieux
Qui là-bas regarde les cieux
C'est un Poète!

Si jamais son regard s'arrête
Sur vos fronts candides et doux
Petits enfants découvrez-vous!
C'est un Poète!

The only poet I have known intimately is John Drinkwater, and he does not spend much of his time in regarding the Heavens, except metaphorically. But if little boys do not always remove their hats when they meet him, they certainly ought to.

Thus Phil and I, like Mr. George Moore, being authors as well as servers of the Cyprian, just about this time became joint dramatists, almost by accident. It occurred to one or other of us that 'Shock-headed Peter', adapted in dramatic form, would make an admirable children's entertainment for the Christmas holidays, and that the supply of these entertainments was not adequate to the demand, for as yet 'Alice in Wonderland' stood almost alone in the field and, though it now seems to have existed for ever, 'Peter Pan' had not yet been conceived and written, and we spent a few hours planning the scheme and marking the particular verses and incidents which could be turned into songs and scenes. This was as far as we had got when on one evening in November I met the impetuous Arthur Bourchier, who was always ready to listen to any suggestion, especially if it came from a member of his beloved O.U.D.S. I do not know why, but I was guilty of a mild deception. Instead of saying that we contemplated writing such a play, and perhaps because I thought he might thank me for the idea, but give the commission for its carrying out into more experienced hands, I told him we *had* written it. To my consternation he replied, 'Well, send it along to-morrow morning, and if it is as good as I expect it will be I will put it into rehearsal at once'. I had the sang-froid to inform him that it was not yet typed and that, as is indeed the case, my handwriting was quite unreadable, but

even then the situation was desperate enough. But we tackled it. Carr and I worked the whole of the next day and sat up the whole of the following night, with much black coffee if with no wet towels, and somehow or other we finished it. Bourchier duly read it, expressed himself delighted and Walter Rubens, who had then just left my old house at Harrow and, after six months in Germany, was about to go into his father's business on the Stock Exchange, undertook to complete a musical score within a week and a delicious score it really was and is. We then proceeded to obtain a cast, with a proviso, on the part of Bourchier, who had a rather economical mind, and of this he had given us full proof when discussing the question of authors' fees, that no one was to have a higher salary than ten pounds a week. Ten pounds, of course, represented a great deal more then than it does to-day, but even so it would not tempt everybody, though it was a fortune in comparison with what some members of a London cast were paid. When my wife appeared at the Garrick Theatre some years later, to play a small part and understudy, she received sixteen shillings! Our first engagement, and he secured the maximum, was George Grossmith, then junior, and our 'Harriet' was Miss Nina Boucicault and, I believe, though I couldn't be certain, that Bourchier sprung another two pounds beyond his limit for her services! But my readers will agree that we were not doing so badly. 'Augustus', the chubby lad, was played, and most amusingly, by a young Etonian who had just gone on the stage, after having made a great local reputation and a name as a comedian in his school. He was the son of Dr. Cornelius Herz, who was known to everybody in

those days in connection with 'The Panama Scandals', though what particular scandals were associated with that connecting link between the two Americas I did not then and do not now know. R. C. Herz, after his success, and it was a great one, went to America, where in a very few years by his clever acting he became a 'star', restored the faded family fortunes and then unfortunately died. And the 'Phil' was my friend H. M. Woodward of Keble College, who had been 'Puck' in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at Oxford, and was an agile and amusing actor. But though he, too, was a success, he was a delicate man, whom late hours did not suit, so that in spite of his temptations, which were many, he decided to give up the stage and become a doctor instead. They were the principals in the cast, and there was besides a chorus of children. I do not now remember, ungratefully, any of their names, though they all were delightful, but none of them, I think, quite achieved the distinction of two of our little chorus girls of the following year, when the piece was revived. Their names I *do* remember. One was Madge Titheradge, and the other Marie Löhr, and her mother, by the way, Kate Bishop, was the 'mother' in the cast, in both years, if I remember right.

Phil Carr and I proceeded to 'produce' the play, jointly and severally, and in spite of every assistance from the cast a nice mess we made of it. It gradually began to dawn upon us that the handling of a stage with complicated lighting and scenery is not quite so simple as at the Queen's Gate Hall, and Arthur Bourchier, who came to witness a rehearsal, quite kindly, but in his usual thunder-stormy fashion, agreed with us and called in his brother-in-law Dion

Boucicault to save the situation, which just in time he did. In later years I did see faults in Boucicault's almost too meticulous methods. I could see, I thought, rather uncomfortably the strings being pulled by an invisible hand, but in this instance, at least, we, as authors, were under the deepest debt of gratitude to him. And a delightful creature he was, under his rather frigid and disapproving manner, and a worker, who, if he did not spare his company, still less spared himself. Later, as an actor, I discovered an unfailing method of playing a part exactly as I wanted to under his direction. If I wanted, for example, to wear a beard and a frock coat instead of a lounge suit and a clean shaven face, I had only to say to him 'My idea, Dot, is that this fellow would *not* be old-fashioned enough to be bearded and frock-coated—he would have no face trimmings and a short jacket', and Boucicault would at once reply, 'I'm sorry, my dear boy, I don't agree with you at all. If you please, a frock coat *and* a beard'. And so we both were satisfied! But this is a digression.

Our excitement upon the first afternoon, 'authors' who were just of age and a composer who was not even that, was intense, and a very odd first afternoon it was—a cold and snowy Boxing Day. The first act went really with a roar, and the second, though it flagged a little, was proceeding merrily enough, when, during the scene when the unfortunate 'Harriet' was being burnt alive, something went wrong both with the lights and the fire effect, a column of smoke ascended and, though there was nothing dangerously wrong, half the audience began to choke and the other half left the theatre. No fur-

ther attention was paid to anything on the stage, and the curtain came down in almost complete silence. I went round to congratulate the actors as best I could, and returned to George Street in a state of complete depression. I knocked at my father's study door, for he had been, under protest, at the performance, since he thought the affair a sad wandering from the straight path, and but for the intervention of our friend, Willie Mathews, K.C., would have insisted on my using a pseudonym. And all he said to me was 'Better luck next time', with a secret hope, I am sure, that there never would be a next time. But Fortune favoured me. The critics had all left in the middle of the second act, to snatch a little refreshment before tackling the pantomime at Drury Lane, and not one of them knew anything of, or at least mentioned, the disaster. One and all wrote of the affair with the most ungrudging and enthusiastic praise, and I blush to say that many of them described the overwhelming reception at the end, and the call for the young authors, of which there never really was a suggestion, with convincing realism. And since there was, as I have said, a large public waiting for a simple and healthy entertainment of the kind, the thing really was a success, and even that year Bourchier would have made quite a lot of money out of it, and we as much as we could reasonably expect, had not unfortunately the Queen died at the height of the season. That finished it. If I remember right we played to something like £240 on the afternoon before she died and reopened to £27. That, at least, was the proportion. As I have said, it was revived in the following year, and did nearly as well. The year following that Bourchier found an-

other children's play called 'Water Babies', founded on Kingsley's story, and after that he went temporarily out of management. It was revived a few years later at the Vaudeville, but on the whole it was badly done, and cast against my advice and it did not succeed.

The war, of course, made 'Struwwelpeter' as impossible as dachshunds, but, as I write, it is being presented by Mrs. Mulholland at the Wimbledon Theatre, and there are at least not many children's plays thirty years' old that would have been given a revival.

I ought to have mentioned that on each occasion 'Shockheaded Peter' was preceded by a highly sentimental one-act play by Tom Gallon, entitled 'The Man who stole the Castle', and, in it, acted Grahame Browne, Minnie Terry then aged about twelve and Leon M. Lion. Lion was also, I think, part author, and he must be even younger than I or at least he looks it.

With the money that I made out of the authors' fees, no less, I think, than £400, a sum which it seemed then to me no amount of riotous living could actually exhaust, I carried out a long cherished project to set myself up in rooms and leave the family circle. My parents were then living in Grosvenor Street, and I had my own little 'suite' with a separate entrance from a mews at the back, but that did not seem to be enough. At any rate, as is I suppose natural, we parted with, I hope, mutual esteem, and I took a lease of a set of chambers in Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, and for what happened to me there, please have the patience to follow me into the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE DECISIVE STEP

I HAD NOT come to a decision to take to the theatre as a professional actor, and luckily, for I should have been grievously disappointed. I never at any time cherished the illusion that I could succeed as a dramatist, for the invention and arrangement of a plot is entirely beyond me, being all part of that inadequacy which has made me fail so woefully as a mathematician. But I did want to write, and to write about the theatre which I loved, and one night, when he was dining with my father, I confided that ambition to Sir Douglas Straight. He, many of my readers will remember, had been a successful barrister in England, then a judge in India, and on his retirement and in late middle age had become a journalist, first editor with one of the Hamiltons of Harrow of the 'Pall Mall Magazine', and then singly of the 'Pall Mall Gazette'. In his former capacity, he had accepted some verses and a story from me, and I believe he liked them. Anyhow he liked my father, and very kindly he gave me the position of writer of dramatic notes, or gossip as to-day it would be called, for the 'Gazette'. It brought me in a small but regular income which, with my allowance, made me feel considerably better off, as a bachelor, than I have ever felt since, and the amount of work was negligible, for since the notes appeared on Monday all I had to do was to copy the always accurate information retailed by Mr. Malcolm Watson in the

previous Thursday's 'Daily Telegraph', with its order reversed and sugar-coated in what I was pleased to consider my exclusive style. I never went near the office in all the years I kept the appointment, except on one occasion, when I called by order to receive a wigging for having carelessly spoken of 'that promising young actress, Miss Mary Moore'. I really meant Hilda—poor Hilda—and after all Miss Mary Moore was to the end of her acting career a young actress. But he let me off with a caution and a command to remember that the 'Pall Mall' could allow no inaccuracy to occur in its columns, and incidentally he had corrected the mistake himself without allowing it to be printed. I wish all editors were as careful. A year or two ago I started collecting inaccuracies in the theatrical notes of one of our leading papers, and marked down thirty-seven in less than a month, when I decided that it was too tedious and unexciting a pursuit. I sent in my notes from the remotest places, allowing time for the vagaries of the post office, and the sub-editor must have sometimes wondered how the latest information as to the English theatres could be reasonably collected in the Black Forest. Only when later, as I shall presently relate, I went to the West Indies, I felt obliged to consider that the postmark of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and the recounting of plans of budding actor-managers who by the time the notes arrived might have committed suicide a fortnight since, might prove too much for the patience of Sir Douglas, and I called upon him to resign if necessary. But he said if I would provide a suitable and entirely satisfactory locum tenens, I might still continue on the staff. I did so, to the best of my endeavour, but while I

was away, my services and his were dispensed with, on the grounds that the editor had come to the conclusion that the work could be done as satisfactorily within the office, and so my nice little income disappeared. And so, a little later, it was some comfort to remark, did the Monday notes, at least in their old form. I am far from suggesting that my understudy played his part badly. At any rate, he did pretty well for himself afterwards, and his name was Patrick Hastings, not then at the Bar, but I like to think that my thirty-two shillings a week smoothed his way to the Attorney-Generalship. And, while I think of it, I am sure that had my note about Miss Mary Moore appeared, she would have let me down very gently, as she did only a year ago when absent-mindedly I addressed her on an envelope as

'Dear Lady Wyndham,
43, York Terrace,
Regent's Park, N.W.8.'

She merely told me that I must not exhibit so obtrusively and compromisingly an affection which she knew I quite sincerely felt, as indeed I do!

To-day as I am writing this page, I read in the 'Daily Telegraph' the obituary notice of Sir E. Ray Lankester, together with a reproduction of his portrait by Orpen, surely, if I am any judge, one of the most touching and beautiful that has ever been painted. It was he, of all people, who strongly urged me to go upon the stage, even going so far as to tell me that it might be a duty to myself which should over-ride my father's strong prejudices, however much I respected them. He was an enthusiastic theatre-goer, though his criticisms were sometimes

eccentric, and he startled me once by asking me if I had observed that one of the nurses in 'Shock-headed Peter', who were introduced to strengthen the vocal ensemble of the chorus and had otherwise nothing to do, had the best pair of ankles in London? As a matter of fact, I hadn't, but I treated the information with immense respect as yet another proof of the powers of observation in a great natural historian. But then, or is the story apocryphal, did not Ray in earlier years resign the plum of his profession, the Chair of Natural Science in Edinburgh, because he found his dancing partners so uninteresting? A very great man and a very great gentleman, who was never afraid to say just what came into his mind, and was the arch-enemy of all Humbug and Mumbo-Jumboism. He was, and continued all his life to be, an old family friend, but his tribute to my acting ability was paid owing to his regular attendance at the New Year's Eve parties given by Lady Lewis in Portland Place, every year till the death of the first Sir George. I do not know when they started, but for a long time they were in the virtual control of Paul Rubens and myself, with Graham Robertson to write some of the sketches and the lyrics, and Katie Lewis and Viola Tree and Evelyn Beerbohm to act in them. I spoke a little while ago of Oxford being the best audience in the world, I should almost have added with the exception of the Theatre Royal, Back Drawing-room, Portland Place. For there, with Tree and John Sargent and Rufus Isaacs and Joseph Comyns Carr and George Henschel and Ellen Terry and Irving and Sir James Barrie, and I could continue with a list that would embrace almost every late Victorian celebrity—we had an audience

that would seize upon every point however subtle, and react to it almost before it was spoken. Those evenings, with the gay supper parties that followed them, were to me, at any rate, so inspiring and so exciting, that it would make me feel dull and elderly to begin analysing them and dissecting them in detail. I once heard Lady Lewis, perhaps the most brilliant hostess of her time, after Sir George Henschel had been singing 'The Müller Lieder', say that she could never think that her life had been unhappy, for she had heard so much good music. 'Ars longa, vita brevis', and though I am far from pretending that our annual burlesques were 'Art', it was the presence of so many people whose lives, or the best part of whose lives, had been devoted to art, which made them so interesting and so memorable. At any rate I have never, in the real theatre, felt the thrill that I experienced, at the burst of laughter and applause, when I sat up in my cradle, as a modern baby, and reprimanded my parents, acted by Molly Hare and Hugh Brodie, a later war victim, on their extremely old-fashioned views with regard to the problem of divorce, nor shall I ever forget the picture of poor Viola Tree on the back stairs made up as a tramp cyclist, with the tears pouring down her dirty cheeks, because *her* turn, and we took these things with tremendous seriousness, had not gone quite so well as she had expected. And Mrs. Patrick Campbell, generally the scorer! Does she remember Joe Comyns Carr's remark to her at supper? For some reason one of the plays had been assisted by the services of a hired 'real professional' child—a particularly bad specimen with corkscrew curls and a cockney accent —'Ah, Mrs. Campbell, with your appearance and

that child's talent what an actress you might have been.' Those days can never return, and if they did, a generation of brighter still young people might come along to tell us that we were really not quite so funny as we thought we were.

My chambers in Gray's Inn overlooked the gardens, were deliciously comfortable and cost only £60 a year, and that included three bedrooms, a queer cupboard-like bath-room and a large sitting-room, which, to my mother's horror, I painted black, then the very last word in what might now be called sur-realism I suppose! On the first night I went to bed feeling that I had reached a harbour in which I could remain happily anchored for the rest of my life and woke up at three to discover my mistake, and decide to move at once. For it was next to a police station, and there almost nightly stray dogs were brought and chained up till they could be conveniently transferred to Battersea. But an interchange of dining-room and bedroom hastily arranged, overcame this difficulty. I gave here many pleasant parties, and for a time I even kept a visitors' book, which I still have, decorated with drawings by Albert Rutherston, Gordon Craig, and other of my friends. I mixed with art students and their kind then more than with actual theatre people for perhaps I felt, though quite unconsciously, that in my work in the future it was their influence that would be of more help to me. And I did make great friends with some of my next door neighbours, James Welch and his wife, who was a sister of Richard le Gallienne, and that really great draughtswoman Edna Clarke Hall and her husband, then at the Bar and now a police magistrate. And once Kathleen

Bruce and her brother, a curate at St. Anne's, Soho, came to spend one night with me, that she and I might go to a dance. For some reason or other, I think as a matter of fact I was deputising, as I sometimes did, for Phil Carr, who was then dramatic critic on the 'Daily News', she preceded me to the party. (On one occasion, at least, I astonished him by writing a whole column on the beauty of a child actress that I had discovered in a suburban pantomime. And her name was Lily Elsie.) When I arrived, I found that she had fallen and broken her leg. With the help of some girl students, who found their lessons in anatomy at last of practical value, we brought her back to Gray's Inn, and sent for a doctor who promptly decided that she must stay where she was for at least six weeks. Her brother, most jesuitically I thought, decided that he could return to his own rooms in Soho Square, Mrs. Brooks, my housekeeper, plus a leg in plaster of Paris being ample chaperonage, and there we were, a fortnight before Christmas. My own family were to spend the holidays in Hampshire, but I thought that I must not neglect my guest and that I would give a dinner party in her honour, she being by then able to hobble. But though her brother and Mabel Beardsley were available, there was nobody else free, and you can't have a real Dickensy Christmas banquet for four. So it occurred to me to advertise for guests! And this is how I did it, in the columns of the 'Morning Post', to secure a reasonable social atmosphere. 'A brother and sister [note a trifling hypocrisy, but Queen Victoria was only just deceased] living in rather pleasant rooms near the Temple invite any ladies or gentlemen who may be lonely to dine with them on Christ-

mas Day. All ladies must prefer Lewis Carroll to Marie Corelli and the gentlemen must not wear made-up ties. Reply Box XXX.' It does not seem very daring to-day, but the sensation this advertisement caused was immediate and tremendous. One paper, I think it was the 'Daily Telegraph', had a leading article on the subject, and I don't think any, unless it was 'The Times', refrained from comment. We had over four hundred replies, written with varying wit, and we chose eight or ten of the guests who promised to be most amusing, writing (a heavy labour) polite regrets to the others. And to the accepted we indicated a meeting place at the top of Chancery Lane. So heavy was the correspondence that I forgot all about the dinner, which, of course, Mrs. Brooks could not attempt to cope with, and it was only with a frantic effort, and after many failures, that I persuaded the Café Roche to send one in, with its attendant waiters. When the moment arrived to meet my guests, I began to wish I hadn't done it, though Mabel and Kathleen and her brother were quite brave. And I must say it was a most amusing evening. The party included a genuine and delightful brother and sister, a French actress who was stranded here for some unknown reason, and who remained friends with us for many months afterwards, a very old but very lively general—K.C.B. and all the rest of it—an Indian Civilian grass widow, who grew perhaps a little too lively as the evening proceeded, and two young American students. We played snapdragon and charades, and what not, and parted with vows of eternal friendship at two in the morning. And with the exception of the French actress, whom we invited to lunch the next

day, and therefore she had to be told, no one of them knew or, I believe, guessed, the name of their host, for in any case I was then no public character in any degree. Mabel had been sworn to secrecy, and pretended to be an advertised-for guest, and I tell the story here for the first time in detail!

It must have been shortly after this, that Kathleen and I went together to listen to a lecture on the Armenian massacres, when an appeal was made for ladies to go out and help the starving women and children, and characteristically she decided to start for Armenia the next day, almost her sole equipment being a rather moth-eaten fur coat of mine, which I had purchased 'in a lot' at an auction sale, and her experiences, rather terrible, are recorded in a published book of her letters. She did not, in those days, pay much attention to dress. On one occasion I reprimanded her, for wearing some black gloves with the wrong kind of white seams, and insisted on her buying another pair. She promptly lost one of them, and a year after I met her sporting one glove with white seams and one without! But in this respect, at least, she is now a reformed character!

And it was then, or surely a little later, for she is still young and pretty, and yet it must not be much later or I shall become muddled with matrimony, that I made great friends with a girl painter called Gwen Salmond (now Mrs. Smith). I am sorry, but even in the most refined memoirs they cannot all be 'now the Marchioness of Carrabas'. She invited me to dine with her people, and introduced me to her two younger brothers 'nice boys, but not a bit exciting'. Nor were they, judged from the standard of a girl who had actually sold to Drury Lane a de-

sign for a poster, and a man who not only was on the staff of the 'Pall Mall Gazette', but known as a brilliant amateur actor to half of the best part of Chelsea. And now I am I, and she, as I rather reluctantly mentioned (though she is quite brazen about it) is Mrs. Smith, and the two younger brothers are only a couple of Air-Marshals. Which proves that it is never too young to begin to be exciting!

A few months ago Mr. Arnold Bennett stated that there was nothing so excruciatingly dull as a party of stage people at midnight. I quote, I think fairly, the substance of his remark though not the form. Well, I venture to say, using as a smoke-screen a phrase which he particularly detests, that some of the dullness may have emanated from himself, not that he himself is ever dull, far from it, but no one, if he is so inclined, can be so terrifying or so liable to turn a harmless party in a parlour to a cohort of the silent and the damned. Also by some inhibition of nature, Arnold Bennett, though eternally if unwillingly curious, will never understand the attitude, I dare not say the mind, of theatre people. And I venture also to say that a party of literary people can be even duller, with its young ladies, pretending, but never quite succeeding, to be pretty and well dressed, growing skittish in the early hours, but always with a due regard to rhythm and nice phraseology, one eye lecherously rolling and the other fixed on the dictionary of quotations. This is at least the view of a theatre man who happens to be present. I bar from my imaginary party, amongst many others, my friends Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West and Hugh Walpole, just as he would surely bar Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Granville-Barker, Noel Coward, and Peter

Godfrey, all among the best talkers in England. Of course, it is perfectly true that to an outsider, a gathering of one profession is always inclined to be dull. Have you ever been to a 'medical' dinner? I have. And though I shall have further occasion to talk of Arnold Bennett, I shall not take him again to task, which will, no doubt, be a considerable relief to him.

If one must attend a gathering of any one profession, one should choose pictorial artists. I do not quite know why I say this, perhaps because I am myself a draughtsman, though unfortunately my completed works are so deformed (and that not quite in the way that they may be taken as suitable examples of modern art) that I have never allowed anyone but myself to see them. With one exception. I attended a charity fancy ball, the feature of which was that for a guinea any guest might have a lightning portrait drawn by Orpen or John or Lavery or Albert Rutherston or Gerard Chowne, and I know not who else, or if actually these. I was sitting in their enclosure, when a very intellectual dowager appeared, and said to me, 'Will you kindly draw me?' I did, and a very ghastly affair in five minutes I produced. She looked at it without visible emotion, handed me a guinea and walked away. Remorse seized me. I did not admit myself a complete fraud, but suggested to her that my drawing, in this instance, was a failure, and she had much better, without further expense, sit to Albert Rutherston. But she merely remarked, 'Thank you, I like it', and disappeared. And still, perhaps, in her broad-minded collection, I am hung.

That phrase 'I like it' can be a useful one, as I

know from my acquaintance with a certain handsome but not very gifted retired colonel, in the Garrick Club. He was an ardent first-nighter, and when the St. John Ervines and the Agates, or their similar predecessors of that time, shrugged their shoulders and called upon the Deity, he merely said, 'Well, I liked it'. It was all he ever did say. But he acquired a reputation for sound judgment based upon that phrase, and he spent the evening of his days, a happy and respected man, as chairman of one of the Sunday play-producing societies. Sheridan would have adored him and 'I liked him'. He should have been buried in Westminster Abbey, next to Gay. Then when the tourist had been duly disheartened by *his* self-written epitaph, 'Life's a jest and all things show it, I thought so once and now I know it', he could have been cheered up again by reading on the next tablet, 'Well, I liked it'. And I believe he did, bless him, and, quite honestly, I do too.

I continued to take some interest, though not a very active one, in politics. I became a member of the '80 Club, and attended the functions, but I have never cared much about stars and staircases. But I do remember seeing Oscar Wilde at a party of Lord Battersea's, though this incidentally, to save my chronology from complete damnation, must have been in my Oxford days. He wore in his button-hole, I do hope I'm right in saying it and I think I am, but you never know what thirty-five years won't put into a button-hole, his famous green carnation. And I saw him once again, just before the end, a wreck staggering out of some café in the Quartier, and by himself. I had an idea that he wanted to speak to me, though of course he did not know in the least who

I might be, but I was frightened, and avoided him, and I'm very sorry.

My most interesting political experience was staying with Charles Trevelyan throughout his fight for the Elland Division of Halifax, when Rosebery was leader of the Liberal party. I was sent to help him by the '80 Club, for although we were at Harrow together, he was older and a monitor, and in the football XI and I did not know him. It was all great fun. I had never spoken in my life, but I made up a speech, which, with slight variations, I delivered everywhere, and Charles to this day says that it won him a thousand votes—a little counterbalanced by the fact that I overlooked 500 in the counting.

I print two little songs I wrote, and which were sung everywhere, not for any merit they have as compositions, but because political allusions of a bygone time seem always a little picturesque. It is amusing to think that the rather unworthy dig at his opponent for not going to the war was passed by Trevelyan, but he belonged then to the very Imperialist Wing of the Liberal Party, and was all for guns and battleships!

COATS OFF!

The Major's left the Stock Exchange, he's panting for the fray,
In a brand new suit of khaki, 'made in Birmingham', they say:
By the 9.45 he steamed to the front, in a first-class dining car;
But—he didn't don the khaki when the trumpets sounded war!

CHORUS

So it's coats off, Liberals, the fight has just begun,
Coats off, Liberals, there's going to be some fun;
And we'll teach the gallant major what he does not seem to know—
That Yorkshire isn't Brummagem, and Elland's not for Joe.

HAMMERSMITH HOY

We'll tell him that the Union Jack is not a Tory rag;
And it isn't only Tories who have died for England's flag.
He shan't get in for Elland on a played out game of 'spoof';
For Lambton's a good Liberal, and Roberts holds aloof.
So it's coats off, etc.

He'll talk of social programmes, and we'll bid him call to mind
A lot of little promises the Tories left behind;
They're absent-minded beggars, and their weaknesses are great,
So they're trying to use the Union Jack to wipe them off the slate.
So it's coats off, etc.

The Major's left the Stock Exchange, he's eager for the fray,
And 'The Soldiers of the Queen, my boys', is the tune he means to play;
But wait till the night of October, lads, for then or the morning after,
You needn't fear, he'll march to the rear, to the tune of Elland's laughter!

So it's coats off, Liberals, the fight has just begun;
Coats off, Liberals, there's going to be some fun,
And on the evening of the ninth we'll shout to the London Toff,
'The Liberals win! Trevelyan's in! and Major Coates is off!'

H.M.S. EMPIRE

Oh what will become of the ship of State,
If she sails under Captain Joe,
With Arthur asleep on the quarter-deck
And the sea-sick Dukes below?
Hicks-Beach, the Purser, throwing cash,
To the hungry sharks around her;
While they leave the workman's boat on the lee,
With his wife and children, to founder.

CHORUS

With their 'Yo, heave, ho! Away we go!
With a khaki tide o'er the boundless blue'
But woe the day, she'll have to pay
For being propelled by a Brummagem screw!

The storm clouds gather everywhere,
The sea-sick Dukes feel iller;
And Arthur is woke by the howling wind,
And tries to get hold of the tiller.
There's a terrible fight, for the shore's in sight,
And the rocks look fierce before him;
And he shouts to Joe, 'Hi, there, let go',
With the water dashing o'er him.
With their 'Yo, heave, ho!' etc.

But just as the cry is 'Sauve qui peut',
The passengers shout with joy,
'We see a sail on the starboard bow.
Hi, Rosebery! Captain, ahoy!'
There's a ringing cheer as the sail comes near
For with help of the Elland vote,
We'll have sent enough Liberal stalwarts home
To manage a safe lifeboat.

Then its 'Yo, heave, ho!' away we go
To rescue the ship of State,
Trevelyan's one of the lifeboat crew,
So they will not be too late.

At one small meeting, in an out of the way part of the constituency, the chairman very naturally asked Trevelyan something of my quality and qualifications, and he replied, 'Oh, tell them that he is a nephew of Lord Playfair', for he had been, as I have mentioned, a rather prominent Liberal, once a Yorkshire member and Postmaster-General. And this, believe it or not, but it is literally true, is how the stalwart Radical and Iconoclast introduced me: 'Well, gentlemen, we have a great pleasure in front of us to-night. We have here to address us a gentleman who, if not an Honourable in his own right, is the next best thing. He's the nephew of a Lord!' Was this startling disclosure received with embarrassment?

Not a bit of it, it was cheered to the echo. What would happen to-day, say in the constituency of Mr. Maxton, if it were repeated? I wonder.

I spoke the same speech in the south of England afterwards, and though some of its 'points' went well enough, it was only received very mildly, so its reception in the North must have been largely due to the enthusiasm of the audiences. And I remember that down South, was it at Bromley? I was followed by Masterman, who was quite furious at being kept waiting, and the audience being put out of the mood for his very different style, and he showed it only too plainly, crushing the witness for his own faith with 'I will not attempt to emulate'—a queer comedian of a word 'emulate'; somehow it always reminds me of Nelson Keys.

And now I come to the decisive step, which after a year at the Bar, I took with much searching of conscience. I went to Arthur Bourchier, who had always promised his help, and asked him if he was in a position to fulfil that promise. He did so at once, offering me not merely an engagement, but a forty weeks' contract, and he asked me what salary I would require. I suggested five pounds a week, and this was his very characteristic reply: 'It's curious, Nigel, that you should have said that. Because it's exactly what I think you are worth to me.' A bow and a murmur of appreciative thanks on my part. Then he continued: 'But I shan't give it you. I feel that you are the sort of man who one day will be driving the coach yourself, and the sooner you learn the value of economy the better. You shall have four.' And we settled it at that, and all things considered, for, after all, I had nothing but an amateur reputa-

Photo. Bertram Park

'BEFORE THE BANDBOX CROWDED'

tion, with no regular training to go on, I think it was exceedingly generous of him. And very pleased I was to get it, for I thought, and think, that my father would have been quite justified in cutting off my allowance of three hundred a year, which from my going to Oxford he had given me. But he did not. It did, moreover, cause both him and my mother much grief and disappointment, and neither of them really learned ever to see my point of view. In spite of that I cannot pretend to regret that I took the step I did. I am only sorry that neither of them knew or guessed that it was going to lead to any small measure of success.

Bourchier started his season with a rather sententious comedy called 'The Bishop's Move', written, I think, by the young lady known as John Oliver Hobbes, who was a very fashionable writer for the fashionable. I suppose she is completely forgotten now. I had, I confess, my doubts about her then, for it was an age when to be ununderstandable was half-way to being considered brilliant. Anyway, I made a disastrous failure the other day of attempting to re-read one of her novels. There was no part for me in this, except that I had to be a monk singing a 'Te Deum' before the curtain went up. Luckily we finished then, and were never visible to the naked eye, so we escaped the robes and the tonsure. But the play was short, and the appetite for entertainment stronger then, so a first piece was decided upon, and my professional début was therefore made in 'A Pair of Knickerbockers' written by Eden Phillpotts. But, as I believe his custom still is, he never appeared upon the scene at rehearsals. I must say I thought 'A Pair of Knickerbockers' an exceedingly futile and

rather tasteless affair, but Bourchier liked it very much and the audiences, or that part of them that was early, used to laugh a good deal, and so it was kept on before two or three other three-act plays, and I thought at one time I should never be allowed to 'go into trousers'. But at least my companion, for it was a duologue, was delightful, and we have remained friends to this day, though she has long retired from the theatre, and is the wife of a very distinguished naval officer. Of course, I should have married her myself, but either she didn't want to or carelessly I forgot to ask her, I forget which. Anyway, she introduced me to her best friend, who is now my wife, and herself was chief bridesmaid. The trouble was that we had acted together so long that after the clergyman had pronounced the blessing, quite mechanically I took 'Clemmy' as we called her, by the hand instead of the bride, bowed to the congregation, blushed crimson because there was no applause, and proceeded down the aisle, hearing an imaginary voice call, 'This is not a place of entertainment', and I was only rescued by the timely aid of the best man from committing a kind of *ex post facto* bigamy on my wedding day.

But perhaps I am romancing, and certainly I am anticipating. Perhaps the pleasantest thing in stage life is—or rather was, for it is now common to almost all strata of society—the easy companionship between the sexes, a companionship which seldom led, or, at any rate, never was of necessity expected to lead, into deeper waters. I know that when, after our first rehearsal 'Clemmy' and I drifted quite naturally over the road together, she to tell me of her vast experiences of the stage, which extended over a

period of at least ten months, and I to invent mine as best I could, I thought that here was 'Life' indeed. And when we were joined by a young, and, as I thought, very pretty girl, in a check skirt, and, oh horror! to think of now, could it have been a speckled 'French Sailor' hat, my cup of bliss was overflowing. In the growing intimacy of two performances, for I was never a hasty youth, I planned a little supper party in Gray's Inn and, quite casually, I asked 'Clemmy' to bring the girl in the check skirt if she happened to meet her. I intended, being a man and a host, that this *obiter dictum* should imply a thorough and exhaustive search within a three hundred yards radius of Maiden Lane, but Miss Elfrida Clement was a casual and literal person, and great was my annoyance when she turned up, not only without the lady in the check skirt, whom she *hadn't* happened to meet, but with a total stranger whom she had. As it is only thirty years ago and I am still angry, I hereby inform the world that it was *not* the distinguished naval officer, but a most uninspiring young man, whom I have no doubt she afterwards treated abominably.

However, the next day I did find the lady in the check skirt at the stage door. I discovered that her name was May Martyn that she had just experienced all the glories (and most of the discomforts) of a tour in America with Nat Goodwin earning the mouth-watering salary of eight pounds a week that she was to be in the next play at the Garrick that she too was quite hurt but not so hurt as I was at not being found in time for the supper and would I give another please and I did and then we supped together happily ever after except that now owing to my

digestion not being what it was my supper consists of a wholemeal biscuit and a glass of water if that and this sentence is getting much too much like James Joyce who is I hope not the sort of author best suited to my life's romance and so I had better stop and you gather what eventually happily happened anyhow but that's where it's different from James Joyce with the full consent of all our parents his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and both Houses of Parliament at that time assembled——

My son, to whom I have just read this passage, though how he could give it reverend attention and do a crossword puzzle at the same time I don't know, tells me that it's not in the least like James Joyce. Anita Loos, *if anything*. It's withering but, to tell the truth, though 'I will be modern, I will' I have never got *very* far with the great Parisian Lord of Bad Language, and I love Anita Loos.

And to resume what I am pleased to call my own style, it was really some little time before we were married or even thought of being engaged, though we spent most of our days together.

After a few months of 'The Pair of Knickerbockers', though that few months seemed an eternity, I had the good fortune, for the Lewis festivities still continued, to do a sketch there in which I had to make use of a foreign accent and Tree invited me, to my gratification and surprise, to play 'Dr. Caius' in a revival of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', Henry Kemble not being available. You may imagine my excitement—after six months on the stage to be asked to act quite a considerable part with Tree, and above all with Ellen Terry, though not I am sorry to say, with Mrs. Kendal, who had decided not to act again.

Bourchier most kindly released me from the thraldom of the breeches, and I was bidden to visit Henry Dana, Tree's manager, to discuss salary. Some of my friends had told me that in that palace ten pounds counted as nothing, but the very chilling Dana thought five would do. My throat was parched and my tongue would hardly articulate, but somehow I was sticking to my point when Tree entered the room, didn't apparently notice either the argument or me, but looked through the window at the stars and suddenly ejaculated, 'Eight, eight, yes, yes', very distinctly and mournfully, as if he had been recalling the nine Muses to earth and couldn't for the life of him remember the name of the last one. And eight it was and plenty, I thought, and at least for the moment I could speak to May Martyn in terms of financial equality.

Our rehearsals were very queer and rather alarming, for Tree was casual and bored, as he always was with productions that he had done before, and there I thoroughly sympathize with him, and his able assistants were more concerned with the quick shifting of scenery than the nuances of acting. But Courtice Pounds, the 'Sir Hugh', and I practised our fight repeatedly and with great vigour, and Lal Brough, the host, gave me a helping hand. But the first night was a nightmare to me and I seemed to be speaking out of Hell into an aching void. But the fight went with a roar, partly, I expect, because I looked as completely terrified as I really was, and at later performances I did manage to get control over my sentences. But the 'productions' at His Majesty's always did overwhelm the actors, unless they were very loud and lusty indeed. Tree was infinitely kind to me and

to the end of his time gave me many chances, even taking me to Berlin to play before the Emperor, though then I was not actually a member of his company at all.

That was a queer experience, for the German temperament is very different from our own. We take it for granted that foreign artists, unless they furnish strong proof to the contrary, must be good—the Germans are determined, if they can, to think them bad. And I am afraid they thought us very bad indeed and Tree's visit was not only a failure, but he was really not well treated. He was a magnificent host to all who came from abroad and had the smallest claim on his hospitality, but the German entertainment of him was meagre, to say the least of it. I remember how, typically, it began at Hanover. Dana had a magnificent programme printed of what should have been a royal progress and almost the first item was 'Arrival at Hanover, 11.30 a.m. (or whatever time it was). Reception by a deputation from the Royal Hanover Schauspielhaus'. At 11.30 the train drew up at the platform, Tree expectantly at the window. On the platform stood a dejected looking low comedian, an elderly and even more dejected looking leading lady, and perhaps three others equally depressed. And one of them carried a pint bottle of champagne on a tray and three glasses. But Tree, ever good-natured, was equal to the occasion and made an oration to the assembled throng. And he said in fluent German, 'My company are very insular people. I daresay if you asked them they would be unable to tell you which way the Rhine flows. But they all know where Hanover is'. And then pointing to a board on which HANOVER was printed in

enormous letters, he finished with a regal gesture, 'It is here!' And taking a glass of champagne, he would have drunk the health of the Royal Hanoverian Schauspielhaus and all its works, if the train hadn't unfortunately moved on suddenly and he had to replace the glass on the tray, where it fell over. And the whistle half-drowned the three feeblest Hoch! Hoch! Hochs! that it has ever been my lot to hear.

One of our leading ladies was Constance Collier, another Hilda Moore and another Alice Crawford. Alice I always loved for the transparent honesty of one of her replies to Tree, for she did (and does) say just what she thinks. She was rehearsing 'Olivia' and Tree, goaded into temporary indignation at some too early morning carelessness said: 'Miss Crawford, you speak those lines as if they were absolute nonsense.'

'Well', said Alice, 'aren't they?'

I am parenthetically reminded—can one say that?—of Dorothy Minto and Granville-Barker, encased in steel-plated armour against cheekiness as a rule, but Dorothy Minto respects the armour of none. I think it was in 'Prunella' and that day Dorothy was badly gabbling. 'Look here, Dorothy', said Barker, and I believe he really did use her Christian name. 'Te tum te tum, te tum te tum te tum' (gabbling) 'that's one way of doing it', and then very slowly and with perfect diction, 'Te tum, Te tum (pause) Te *tum-tum-tum-tum-tum.* That's another. For the love of Heaven, don't you see the difference?'

'Oh yes, Mr. Barker. Of course I do. *Which is right?*'

And that's the most difficult story I've ever had to prepare for print, though it's easy enough to tell. I hope it comes out clearly for it *is* good.

But to retrain to Berlin and incidentally to Alice Crawford. When we drew up at the station I witnessed the only true case I can recall of love at first sight. For the young correspondent of the 'Daily Mail', one Valentine Williams, and later author of 'Clubfoot', was waiting on the platform to receive and perhaps to warn us. He took a look at Alice and has never left her again, and I am bold enough to prophesy that he never will.

All sorts of misfortunes dogged the steps of that visit. The critics were vitriolic, the scene shifters struck, the theatre was inadequate and draughty, society was offended because Tree, who would never have dreamed of doing anything else, invited the 'walking ladies and gentlemen' to meet them at a party, but he never turned a hair or lost his courtliness and amiability, though I believe the whole resulted in a grave financial loss. Perhaps it is true that the preparations lacked thoroughness. I know they did as far as I, in my small way, was concerned, for it was suddenly announced to me that I was to play the first 'grave-digger' in 'Hamlet', which nobody had troubled to tell me before we started. Luckily I knew the words for I had done the part often enough in the Benson Company. (I am afraid at the moment I am being guilty of what Winston Churchill might call 'A Chronological Inexactitude'.) I came to rehearsal but we never reached that scene —it is one of the scenes that hardly ever is reached at rehearsal. Well, I played the part before His Imperial Majesty without any preparation at all and acquitted myself, I think, reasonably well. At any rate if I read its ridiculous printing aright, the leading German paper gave me one of the few sparse

pieces of praise that it condescended to at all. But in the middle of the scene Tree disconcertingly whispered, 'You're not doing any of the right business. What's the matter with you?'

It *was* a little disconcerting, and if I may tamper with the time-machine, reminds me of a first night in a play of Pinero's, when I was struggling with a military gentleman called 'Colonel Ponting'. Mrs. Campbell was the leading lady, and when, on such a great occasion, she should have been paying the strictest attention to the very considerable emotions which were to be expected of her, she actually found time to turn to me and say in a very audible whisper, 'Buck up, Nigel, you're very Colonel Disa-Ponting so far'. And I daresay I was.

It is difficult and unwise to tell 'Tree' stories. There are so many of them, and one may always have been forestalled. But I don't think I have in these cases, nor yet in one of my favourite, which personally I overheard. If it has been printed before, forgive me. Tree was rehearsing a young lady, who would insist upon weeping over her 'childrén', with the accent well upon the last syllable, after the theatrical manner of the 1860's, if we do not libel that epoch of our fathers. At last Tree could stand it no longer and he cried out from the back of the dress circle, 'For Heaven's sake, Miss——, don't say Child*ren*. Chil*dren* is the illegitimate plural of Chee-ild'. And no criticism, I think, could be better to the point. So she learned about children from him.

And just two while I am about it. There was a young actor in his company whose domestic felicity no one was allowed to doubt and who seldom made a remark without prefacing it with 'my dear spouse'.

He also wore the odd clothes which actors sometimes affected, but do not laugh at him too much, for it is not always easy to express individuality when your income is three pounds a week. And Tree whispered, 'Yes, yes. I suppose it's a good thing to wear a hat like that and be faithful to one's wife'. But not in his hearing, for Tree was 'chevalier' every inch of him, and I never heard him say an unkind thing to anybody, nor, I believe, of anybody. And talking of 'chevalier' he was unaffectedly pleased when he received his honour. When it was announced I met him in the lift at His Majesty's, beaming like a schoolboy of fourteen. And he said to me, in outrageous parody of the catch-phrase of the day, 'What's the matter with Herbert Tree? He's all Knight'. And to be equally outrageous, he was rather too fond of 'all night' for my simple tastes, for when I was on tour with him I was invariably bidden to attend his banquets after the performances, at the Majestic at Harrogate or wherever it might be, and I really like going to bed. When there was company I enjoyed it, but occasionally when we were by ourselves I was embarrassed for there were long pauses when he just looked at you, and I am a shy man and, I am afraid, except perhaps with very intimate friends a poor conversational opener. Once I remember I entered his sitting-room and found him alone. He looked at me penetratingly and suspiciously for a long time and then, I suppose for a minute, but it seemed an hour, he continued walking slowly round the supper table placing imaginary coins of the realm upon its edges. I did not know whether I was supposed to applaud this performance or laugh at it, so I merely stood to attention waiting for something else to happen. Nor

do I suppose it was invented for my benefit. I can at least imagine that it had been going on for some time before I came in, just to amuse God and himself. And then suddenly he broke the silence and exclaimed, 'If you gave me all that I wouldn't marry *her*'. And I gathered that he was referring to the engagement of some friend of his, of which he did not approve. Then I would say, 'Oh, I don't know', in feeble defence of a situation in which I wasn't really in the least interested. And this would make him give me another blinding look. And then neither of us said anything for what seemed like four hours, and I would feel like a mouse in the Zoo. Then in desperation I would say, 'Have you been to the Academy?' and he would answer, after an interval of deep consideration of some quite different and unrevealed problem, 'Yes—No', which didn't much help. And then, praise the Lord, in would come the waiter, the tension snapped, a subject of mutual interest would suddenly come to the surface and all would be more than well.

Many stories and sayings of which he was probably quite innocent have been fastened on Tree, but he was undoubtedly a wit, and his wit was helped by his fantastic and essentially inimitable manner, though to the point of boredom many people could imitate his surface peculiarity of speech. Latterly perhaps he was inclined to play too much to the constant demand for epigrams, and I have known him remark, 'I said rather a good thing last night——' but not often did he make that mistake. And it is fatally easy for an actor-manager to set a company of rehearsing actors, only too anxious to be appreciative and to smooth over the fact that they have not

learned their lines, in a roar. Even *I* know that. A great actor? Perhaps not, and I am a small chronicler and not a critic, but some extravagant character parts he played as well as any man could or ever will. An affected man? Well, as Tree himself might have said 'Yes—No'. An affectation of manner, to hide a certain shyness, no, more than a shyness, a genuine modesty, for I don't think he had a high opinion of his own *intellectual* attainments, and he was neither widely read nor a scholar. And also it is true that fortuitously and socially, he moved in an affected set, the uncles and aunts of those who now stand round pictures they don't understand or even try to, and exclaim 'Marvellous', if the painters are well-born or well-dressed or well-to-do or quite dead. But no good actor can ever really be an affected man. This sounds a queer dictum perhaps, for is not acting itself affectation, the assumption by men and women of manners that are not naturally theirs? Yes, but an actor is a machine which receives impressions and records them, and if the record is to be clear, the machine itself must be kept clean and undefiled. I apologize for this brief incursion into philosophy and definition, which is perhaps beyond my scope. But I am very grateful to Herbert Tree, and very fond of him, and I like to defend him from a charge of insincerity of attitude which has often been brought against him by people who knew him much less well than I did, though I cannot pretend to have known him really well. And of all things in the world I do detest affected people, and in the world of Art at least they are completely useless. They shrivel me up. I can get along well enough with executioners and adulterers, and murderers, but they must, please,

be simple and direct. If you want to make the world fit for heroes like me to live in, rid it of the affected people, who say what is not worth saying with pomp and majesty. It won't be an easy task, since, for some reason which I have never been able to understand, it is they alone who, as a rule, can afford butlers and eat delicious ices every other day for luncheon. But, thank God, they can never play or sing or act and have to pay the simple people to do it for them.

CHAPTER VI

AT HOME AND ABROAD

After leaving Tree, my next engagement, perhaps the most interesting I have ever had, was for a tour in the West Indies under the auspices of F. R. Benson, though he did not in fact accompany us. Matheson Lang was our leading man and through it laid the foundations of his distinguished and successful career. I was to take the place, though it could never be taken really satisfactorily, of the last of the great Shakespearean clowns, George Weir. I joined the company only at the last minute and I had to learn about fourteen parts, some of them trifles like 'Falstaff' in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', in the ten days' journey out. Fortunately I knew my Shakespeare pretty well, and I am, or at any rate then was, a very quick study, though frequently I had to comfort myself with one of Tree's dicta, 'I am a great stickler for accuracy—in others'. The enthusiasm of the natives for Shakespeare was really remarkable—though, oddly enough, they seemed quite incapable of following or appreciating Sheridan and Goldsmith, whom also we occasionally performed. I remember being very gratified on my arrival by being met by an elderly dark gentleman who came up to me and said, 'Excuse me, but is your name Mr. Playfair?' 'Yes', I answered. And then he added with intense veneration, 'Not by any chance *the* Mr. Playfair who made so great a success in Mr. Herbert Tree's recent production'. I had never been called

the Mr. Playfair before and I did not know the habit the West Indian native has of absorbing unimportant information from the newspapers and coming out with it again at suitable moments.

Our whole life was delightful and the hospitality we received everywhere immense. The trouble was to find any time for rehearsal at all, and I learned in the West Indies the dangerous habit of 'winging', which, I may explain for the benefit of the uninitiated, is learning by heart your next scene just before you go on. It is a habit which I do not recommend to the young aspirant for stage honours though it may be useful upon occasion.

When our tour was drawing to a close I received a cable from Granville-Barker offering me a part in 'John Bull's Other Island', in the memorable season he had just started at the Court Theatre. I was hideously disappointed to have to reply that our boat would only reach England two days before the opening date. I drove round to the Court from the station to see who had been chosen to take my place and was astonished to find my name upon the bills, and I went on to the stage to find my imperturbable friend who looked up quietly and said, 'Here's your part. Learn it this afternoon. There will be a rehearsal this evening and a dress rehearsal to-morrow —that's all right—off with you'. And that is very like the Granville-Barker of these days and there is no one else quite like *him*. Of course the part was only a short one—though a little later I took the chief part on a long tour in the country.

While I was away in the West Indies my wife-to-be had been making some great successes in various special productions where she had been seen and

approved of by J. M. Barrie, who offered her the understudy to 'Peter Pan' in this, the first year of its production. Miss Nina Boucicault was, of course, the original 'Peter', but at that time she was none too well and was obliged to be absent from a great many of the performances. I never saw my wife play the part but there still exists, though in the course of nature their number is rapidly diminishing though not their firmly rooted faith, a sort of sect of the 'Wee-Frees' who regard my wife as the best of all the 'Peters', and I can readily believe it.

On the strength of all these fortunate happenings we decided to get married, and were duly blessed at Tunbridge Wells from the house of her grandmother. It was a very hot day—I stayed at the Spa Hotel with Arthur Hutchinson and as we drove in state to the church the wheel came off the ancient fly in which we were sitting and we had to run most of the way. I hope the omen was not an unlucky one, but if so I have not yet noticed it, and our silver wedding is approaching. We went for our honeymoon to Bruges and there a charming incident occurred, which I shall never forget. I *had* noticed, though one should not notice these things, that a great friend of mine had apparently forgotten to give me a wedding present and I felt a little hurt about it. When we entered the rooms which we had ordered at Bruges it had become what the Victorians would have called 'a bower'—decorated and beautifully decorated with all the flowers that blow. And that was my friend's present. He had travelled to Bruges after the wedding by the night boat, knowing that we were not coming till the next day, and carried out the whole scheme himself.

Photo. Bertram Park

NIGEL PLAYFAIR AND MILES MALLESON
IN 'THE RIVALS'

And another thing too in connection with our honeymoon in particular I do remember, though I will spare my readers a disquisition on honeymoons in general. I took a private cabin in the boat from Dover to Ostend, and it was a very foggy day. After an hour or two had passed and it *did* occur to me that the boat was proceeding rather gently, I went on deck, and said to my wife, 'Behold the coast of Illyria —or Belgium rather. Does it please you?' And she said, for she is quite incurably straightforward, 'It seems all right—what I can see of it'. And as we stood there the mist gradually lifted, and a ray of sunshine struck, not the palace of King Leopold, but the Lord Warden! The captain was still trying to find the right way out of Dover Harbour!

We settled at first in my flat in Gray's Inn and gave a series of what you might—if benevolently disposed —call dinner parties to our friends.

But Mrs. Brooks was a man's woman. I had trained her to require no personal interviews. We exchanged our views on good housekeeping on the backs of envelopes, and one day appeared ominously on the table, 'Please don't be in to dinner more than three times a week', and I should never have been surprised to read, 'I died this morning. You will find the tea in the cupboard above the bath'. The arrangement seemed to be perfect, but my wife would live a more complicated life, I never could see why.

I do recall particularly a picture of G. K. Chesterton who was coming to dinner. We asked him at eight, but he came at seven, and as there was no one to let him in sat on the cold stone steps for half an hour waiting for us. He might, of course, have filled in the time conveniently with writing a poem, but unfortunately he was suffering from a bad

attack of indigestion, and looked particularly miserable. We paid our apologies as best we could, and offered him brandy and a dozen other remedies for his complaint. But he chose a bottle of burgundy, the oddest medicine I have ever heard of, but it worked with him and we had a delightful evening, for Yeats came too, with several of the fairies of his imagination. I think it was later, but I like to boast the trio while I am about it, that Belloc came and we took him to a play. Wild horses won't drag from me its name, for the author is large and living, but we had a free box, very near the stage, and Belloc would say 'Chrrist how awful!' all the way through. He was quite right. It was, but I feared I should never be given a free seat anywhere again.

My next manager, Mr. George Alexander, was a very old family friend, and his wife, a faithful and devoted patient of my father's, though anyone who knows her to-day, so abundant and overwhelming is her vitality, will find some difficulty in believing that she ever, at any period of her life, had need of medical attention, and I fancy that when she stands hostess on her hundredth birthday, still far off but certain to occur, she will dazzle our eyes with a new costume just a little ahead of the prevailing fashion.

Then a young couple, Alexander and his wife would often come to lunch with us on Sundays in our house in George Street, and I possess a photograph, taken upon the rather grubby leads outside our dining-room window, of my eldest sister and him performing the 'Kangaroo' dance in 'Dr. Bill', the play in which he made his first managerial success. Before that he had been 'juvenile lead' with Henry Irving at the Lyceum.

I think I must have been still at Oxford when Alexander invited me to pay with him a visit to Ascot, as a matter of fact the only time when I have attended that society function. It was for me, and I daresay for him too, a rather embarrassing experience, for to be asked to accompany on such an expedition the recognized Beau of his day rather took my breath away. I possessed, it is true, an outfit sufficiently adapted for the purpose, a black frock coat, a jam pot collar fit to strangle, and a thick square tie which after many experiments could be tortured into the 'Ascot' shape. But unlike Beau Brummell, possessing only one, I could not regard as 'failures' and throw into the waste paper basket two or three others first before attaining perfection or self-satisfaction. Alexander, I remember, did not on that occasion wear a collar like mine, but the first example of the double collar, which is now so universal, and of which, unless evidence is brought to the contrary, I believe him to have been the inventor. Only his collar was not comfortable; that would perhaps have been considered going a little too far in the way of reform. It was high, it was very sharp and very angular, and there was a queer triangular gap in the middle, through which a section of his tortured throat might be aired. It was, however, not the fear that my frock coat, which was not designed in Savile Row, might meet with his critical disapproval that caused the major part of my embarrassment, but the fact that throughout the day I could think of nothing to say that could interest my host, and he made no attempt at all to say anything to me. We relapsed into almost complete silence after the first ten minutes of the journey down, the silence grew into something

like gloom as we promenaded in the paddock or the enclosure, or wherever we did promenade, we ate a silent, though otherwise entirely satisfactory luncheon, we watched the racing, which seemed to me unimpressive, without comment, and we parted mutely, as if each was burying a grandfather. I think as we shook hands he did say, 'Well, remember me to your father,' and I thought of saying, 'And remember me to yours', but I wasn't sure if he had one, so I only answered, 'Yes, thanks very much, I will'. Afterwards I heard that he had remarked that I was a very silent fellow, but somehow I don't think it was altogether my fault.

In spite of this early mishap, we continued friends and I found that he was a man of intense and almost vehement opinions, and when moved to do so, could talk in a torrent.

In any case, when I went on the stage, and for the rest of his life, he was kindness itself and always ready to help me in any undertakings.

I confided to him my ambition to be a 'producer' and for him I made my first attempt in this direction, a little one-act play by Frederick Fenn and Richard Pryce called ''Op 'O My Thumb'. I might have made the most complete hash of it for my experience was small, but Alexander once having given me the job, left the carrying out of it entirely to me, the casting, the ordering of the scenery and everything else, merely stipulating how much it should cost. I believe I am right in saying that he did not even attend a rehearsal. Fortunately it was a great success and made a reputation which lasts, in amateur circles at any rate, to this day. I chose for my leading part a young lady that I had been so fortunate as to observe

in a musical comedy at Leamington and here, at least, my instinct was not at fault. Her name was Hilda Trevelyan. As he left all this to me, I left the fee that I was to be paid for my trouble to him. Here too I learned a useful lesson. I was then, and I hope I still am, a modest man, but George Alexander's estimate of the value of my services was by some degrees more modest than mine! And now I do not 'leave it to you, partner'.

It was a little after this, I think, that he offered me an engagement, subject to the author's sanction, in a play of Pinero's, called 'His House in Order', which he was about to produce. The part was neither long nor difficult, though effective, but for some time my fate hung very much in the balance, for Pinero likes to choose his own actors, as afterwards I am happy to say, he many times chose me; but then I did not know him, and the expression of his eyebrows in a cold and empty theatre, had a terrifying effect upon me. In fact, after two or three attempts it was obvious that he did not approve of me at all, and Alexander whispered to me, 'For Heaven's sake, show him you can act'. But by that time I had begun to wonder what acting was, and if there was such a thing at all how you began to show it. But it luckily occurred to me to enter with something that faintly resembled an air, and to take off a pair of gloves and put them into my pocket with a flourish, and this gave Pinero some confidence and he passed me. But, as I say, he was always very chary of other people's suggestions as to casting, and I remember how often he would say, 'Well, if you can't think of anybody better than that we may as well give it to poor old Dash'. And that is how poor old

Dash got all his engagements. I need scarcely say that I won't tell you who poor old Dash was, but he was not the actor you are thinking of but somebody just like him.

Pinero was a very great producer, though his methods, the methods he then used, at least, would seem a little fierce for the tenderer temperaments of to-day, and to his direction and the touching and beautiful performance of Miss Irene Vanbrugh the great success of 'His House in Order' was largely due, though the whole cast was admirable. It lasted for a whole year, and though my salary was not a large one it was adequate, and life seemed very pleasant and good fortune enduring.

My wife and I had lately moved from Gray's Inn to a tiny but very picturesque house in Swan Walk, Chelsea, and in the summer time, for in those days no one dreamed of taking a complete holiday while an engagement was being fulfilled, we took a little cottage near Langley. It contained four rooms, including the kitchen, and I used to bicycle to it every night along the canals from Slough. A happy time, with no worries that I can remember.

But stage life is a queer thing.

Though I had done very well, had played as I have described, apparently to everyone's satisfaction, good parts in leading theatres, after the run of 'His House in Order', I daresay for the benefit of my character but to the trying of my temper, I lapsed into a long period of very intermittent and casual employment, and had it not been that my wife was more fortunate, or more able, than I, we should have been in a very serious financial position. For my father was by this time dead, and before he died the family fortunes had

suffered a considerable change for the worse. Whether it was a period of widespread theatrical unemployment, I do not know; I can only tell selfishly how it affected me. It lasted on and off for about five years, up to the time, in fact, when my eldest son was born. When that happy event occurred I was actually working in London, but in one of those unhappy plays which was booed on the first night and lived with difficulty for about six more. But immediately following that I was cast for a part by H. B. Irving and from that day to this, with the exception of a deliberate abstention during part of the war, I have earned some sort of a regular salary ever since. I was not born, I fear, to be a money maker, and my income would arouse derision in musical comedy circles, but to 'carry on' in this precarious profession for twenty years without a break is something at any rate to be grateful for.

The casual employment which filled up these five years has its interest in recollection, however unsatisfactory it may have been at the time; and at least it seemed to bring me in touch with all the little movements, which have kept going an interest in the more serious, and perhaps one may say without undue priggishness, the more important and educational side of theatre work.

Philip Carr had been, as I have already said, Secretary of the O.U.D.S. at Oxford, and when he came down, intended to devote himself, as his father had done before him, to work in connection with the theatre, and especially to the revival of interest in the classical plays, at that time almost entirely neglected. He obtained work as the dramatic critic of 'The Manchester Guardian', and later, I think, of 'The

Daily News', but his main interests were concerned with 'The Mermaid Society', a society of which he was sole founder, president, secretary, and, so far as I know, the only member. Its first efforts were directed to performances in the open air at the Botanical Gardens of Milton's 'Comus', 'The Hue and Cry after Cupid', and 'The Faithful Shepherdess'. He chose as his stage an open space in front of the lake in the gardens, and the water was used for the miraculous appearance of the water Goddess, who is summoned in a wonderful song to act as *dea ex machina*. I played 'Comus', and enjoyed the part very much, for he has some long but very interesting speeches, and the only drawback to him is that he wears a long beard, which is not conducive to comfort on a hot summer's day, and the fact that, sun-bathing not being yet in vogue, I was obliged to daub myself nearly all over with Armenian bole. 'Comus' himself is disposed of satisfactorily, and disappears from the play before the entrance of the Goddess, Sabrina fair, and it became my duty then to put on a long cloak and row her in a boat across the water, feathering as carefully as possible for the catching of a crab would only too thoroughly have destroyed the necessary magic of her approach. The principal parts were played by professionals whose services were, like mine, at the moment not too much in demand by the regular theatre managements, and included Madge Titheradge and Julian L'Estrange and Milton Rosmer, but the 'rabble' was composed mostly of art students, several of whom are by this time Royal Academicians or Merchant Princes like Ambrose Heal!

When the season at the Gardens was over, Phil Carr, with a touching faith in the literary taste of

the country, which, I fear, was not altogether justified, took us on a tour of the provinces, a delightful but in some ways a harassing experience, which should have taught me, but didn't, that literature, expressed in terms of active drama, is somewhat narrow in its appeal. Our audiences tended to grow less and less the further we proceeded.

I remember a fatal evening at Peterborough, when our entire takings amounted to one pound and thirteen shillings. Opposite to the theatre was a large workhouse, and I suggested to Carr that it would encourage us and confer an unforgettable boon on its inmates if we admitted them free to fill the vacant seats. He agreed, and I rang the bell and asked for the Master, told him my philanthropic thought, and awaited his stuttering thanks and blush of gratitude. But all he said was, 'Well, I'll ask them. But they've gone across to the theatre so often that they're a bit fed up with it'.

But oddly enough at Sheffield, the last town which we rather despairingly visited, we were so popular that Carr recovered nearly all that he had lost. I do not know what the particular affinity of spirit between Sheffield and Milton is, but it is a fact. And Sheffield has certainly not the reputation of being a good patron of the ordinary theatre.

In any case it encouraged him to further efforts, and on returning to London he took in turns, with a somewhat reckless audacity, the Court and the Great Queen Street Theatre, and proceeded to present a series of revivals of Elizabethan Drama and Restoration Comedy.

For this pioneer work much credit is due to him, and I have personally much cause to be grateful to

him for his example. But hampered as he was by lack of funds and believing, as he did, that a very few performances of each play would exhaust the limited number of his possible patrons, he was naturally unable to devote time to rehearsals, and care to the *mise en scène*, which later experience has taught me to be absolutely necessary to give a project of this kind any hope of real and lasting success.

My wife and I played with him in all these revivals, she making a particular success as 'Corinna' in Vanbrugh's delicious comedy, 'The Confederacy', so much so indeed that she would undoubtedly have made a great mark as an actress, had she not sacrificed this ambition to the cares of a family, for she did not feel that, like Sybil Thorndike, she possessed the unique faculty of rocking the cradle and managing a public career at the same time.

But the two most successful plays that were given were 'The Way of the World' and 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle', both alike distinguished by the really remarkable acting of Mrs. Theodore Wright. Mrs. Wright in any other country but our own would have left behind her an imperishable name. But she cared only for classic acting, her opportunities were therefore small, almost negligible, and her career is another example of the hideous waste which our haphazard system and want of organization in the theatre provides, and the soul of a great artist starved. Well, says Mr. Hannen Swaffer, 'all this talk of a National Theatre is "bunk".' So be it.

It was during this period that I began to realize that there existed in London a small coterie of people who believed that the theatre had in it the potentiality of doing something more than amuse the idle

hours of idle people, that it was intended not to be an anodyne but a stimulant, not to burke our problems but to reflect and intensify them. To this end Shaw and Granville-Barker were working and preaching, and the Stage Society was founded. I was a member of its original committee, and was present at its first exciting performance, which may be said without exaggeration to have founded a new school of thought in regard to the theatre, that of Shaw's 'You Never Can Tell', a play which incidentally was written for Cyril Maude and the Haymarket, though he, admitting its cleverness, thought that its popularity would be exhausted with half a dozen matinée performances, a prophecy which certainly has been proved to be a trifle pessimistic!

'You Never Can Tell' was followed by 'Candida', and it occurred to me that I might introduce these plays to the provinces, and this project I carried out in partnership with Miss Horniman of Manchester, and though our progress was not exactly triumphant, we were much more successful than I had really dared to hope. But we had a really good company, Ellen O'Malley was, I still think, and I believe Shaw agrees with me, the best 'Candida' that could be imagined, nor as her husband could my very great friend Dawson Milward have been bettered. And the understudy to 'Candida' was a young lady called Miss Sybil Thorndike. I remember that long tour as one of the happiest times of my life, for we had plenty of fun in the intervals of elevating the masses. And 'Candida' will always be a pleasant memory to me.

It is a most convenient play to take about for one thing. It contains only six characters, it can be

played anywhere, has no special furniture, and a typewriting machine is its only special 'property'. We took it a little later on a long tour of the Swiss winter resorts, very hard work, but quite profitable. We just wrote postcards to the managers of hotels and kursaals, and said that we were coming, he told his guests and clients, and at least ninety-five per cent. of the entire British population anywhere would pay their five francs, or whatever it might be, to the porter and come to the performance. I thought indeed that I had discovered, for myself and my associates, a simple way of ensuring a yearly income for life. But alas! it only survived a second year. Switzerland threatened to become inundated with touring companies, the hotel managers soon shed their former engaging simplicity, and began to talk of percentages and sharing terms. In fact, we had to bow before the tiresome spirit of commerce and competition.

But we did show the German nation, or a small part of it, how 'Candida' should be played, not that they believed it or even took very much trouble to find out if it might be true.

This was a year or two later, and it happened rather mysteriously, something in this way. There lived in Germany a curious lady called Frau Meta Illing. I don't think she was an actress or had really anything to do with the theatre, but she was determined to do something or other that would bring an affable nod or even a shake of the hand and a fourth Class of the Eagle from Her Imperial Majesty—by which I mean not the Empress but Wilhelm himself. There was a Mr. Illing, but he didn't count much. He was a very little man with a bald head and long whiskers, and whenever he appeared she patted the

bald head with the far away look of one who might be called into the Imperial presence any time within the next decade, and told him to run away as she was busy.

Well, this lady conceived what seemed to me the very far-fetched idea of collecting an English troupe of actors, bringing them to a performance in front of the Court at some Royal Theatre, and then receiving congratulations on their behalf. And, curiously, the idea nearly succeeded but not quite, as I shall relate. She called on Alfred Sutro, although he was, I think, a complete stranger to her, but if you give Alfred the chance of doing a kind action, no introduction is needed. Alfred knew that I was fond of foreign travel, could talk German and was at a loose end, and he recommended me to her to undertake the whole affair and this I did, as best I could. It was not, however, at all an easy undertaking. Frau Illing had an extremely suspicious nature, always imagined that when I said that So and So was a good actor, I really meant that he was a friend of mine, and spent half of her time seeking extraneous advice and upsetting any plans I had made. And on one point she was adamant, and nothing could move her. Somebody, perhaps he was in the entourage of the Emperor, perhaps he was merely determined that a war between England and Germany should be made certain, had persuaded her that the typical English Comedy, which could not fail to please His Majesty, was an affair written by R. C. Carton, called 'Mr. Hopkinson', and by no means a happy example of that charming, but not always inspired, dramatist's work. In any case, so far as it had any merits at all, and I could never see that it had, they were especi-

ally adapted to the comprehension of a cockney audience, born and bred. But she was quite immovable, and though I did succeed in retaining 'Candida' and Wilde's 'Florentine Tragedy' as a stand-by, I had to give way or lose the job altogether.

I engaged an admirable company, which included besides my wife and myself, Herbert Waring, Hilda Moore, Ellen O'Malley, Donald Calthrop, then a very young and cheeky boy, Louis Mercanton, now a film magnate but then a business manager in a small way, and Miss Fortescue, who *would* say all the time, though it was beside the point, that she would rather be going to Paris, and Sam Sothern. I remember well my approach to poor Sam, most amusing but most insular of men. 'Sam', I said, 'have you ever been abroad?' 'No', he answered, 'I hate the d—d place.' But he came and his running commentary made the whole trip more than worth while. And in any case, but for the vagaries and temperament of our misguided *entrepreneuse*, and the wretched play, we certainly had the greatest fun. But we received a shock, Bertie Waring and I, when we entered the portals of the Imperial Theatre at Wiesbaden, which was to be the scene of our first performance and of the Imperial presence. For over those portals in great gold letters was written, 'This is the Temple of the Drama. See that Ye defile it not'. Alas, poor 'Mr. Hopkinson!' We were very kindly received by the 'Intendant' of the Theatre, which was larger than Drury Lane, though Wiesbaden is, I suppose, a town akin to Harrogate. He, the Intendant, or managing director, mentioned that he had known a cousin of mine in Washington, for he had been first secretary of the German Embassy there till he had been *pro-*

moted, yes, *promoted* to his present position. That is how they think of the theatre in Germany—or did.

The auditorium on the occasion of the performance was really a magnificent sight, glittering, impressive. The Emperor sat in his box with twenty resplendent officials and their ladies around him. The signal for the rising of the curtain was given actually by the raising of his hand, the prompter standing for twenty minutes with his eye to a hole in the curtain and the actors stiff in their opening position. Over the performance I had better draw a kindly veil. It was not bad, of its kind; it would have received, I am sure, a kindly if temperate reception on the pier at Eastbourne, but, of course, the German audience did not understand a single word of what it was all about, if, indeed, it was about anything. The atmosphere grew gloomier and gloomier. Frau Illing told us that we should be received by the Emperor after it was over. When to our great relief and, I should imagine, everybody else's, it was, we were drawn up in order of precedence in a draughty corridor. And then there was a sound of sobbing and the poor lady, broken-hearted, came to tell us that Von Bülow had arrived with news of some government crisis and the Emperor had had to leave for Berlin. After that war was inevitable.

We proceeded to play in some other German towns. 'Mr. Hopkinson' was dropped and there really was some modest appreciation of 'Candida' and the Wilde Tragedy. But I cannot pretend that the prestige of English acting was greatly advanced.

Frau Illing after our return, gave up both me and her highest ambitions, but I think she took another and more amenable manager and a second English

Company to Germany, and eventually died from biting a carpet in her rage and despair because a minor Royal Duke had failed to attend one of her performances as she had expected.

I do not carry in the compartments of my mind an accurate record of the parts I played in London and in the country between the date I have now so stumblingly reached, 1907, and the outbreak of the War, nor have I the very faintest intention of disturbing them from dusty records, for I cannot conceive that anybody will be benefited thereby. I have always felt, in trying to be perfectly honest, that the chances of making some name and position as an actor never came in my way. Perhaps also it is true that I never devoted myself single-mindedly enough to their pursuit, I mean tactically and diplomatically, for I cannot accuse myself of not being a worker and a hard worker at the technique of my craft.

I did indeed make 'a hit' in one play of Pinero's called 'The Big Drum', and to this day I meet a faithful few who remind me of it, but the play itself was destined for a very short run, though I think it was Pinero at his very best. But Alexander was entirely unsuited to the rôle of the hero, who was supposed to be a struggling author of the Gissing type, living in rooms in Gray's Inn. Alexander's idea of that sort of life and position was quaint, to say the least of it. It was Gray's Inn glorified to the Nth. And his notion of poverty and squalor descended no further than a very expensive velvet coat and a rich silk tie in admired and carefully regulated disorder. Not to press his trousers would have been too unbearable.

My pleasantest engagement was with Mrs. Patrick

Campbell, for nothing she could ever say to me could make me like her less, and beneath the surface she was and is the kindest and most generous of friends. Her son Beo—poor attractive Beo—who did the bravest things in the War and died bravely and uncomplainingly, had just left the Navy and joined her Company, which consisted very largely, I am afraid I must say, of people who were salaried because she liked them, and not because they could act. Beo certainly did not show as great signs of hereditary talent as he did of hereditary charm. How well I remember his coming to a rehearsal at twelve o'clock, still in his dressing-gown and pyjamas, and of his mother's gentle expostulation from the dress circle, 'Beo, Beo, darling, I can't hear a word you say', and Beo answering, 'No, mother, of course you can't—but then you don't understand the modern method of acting'. And I am afraid he spoke more truly than he thought.

I remember a triumphant day when I made both her and, more astonishingly, the future Mrs. Max Beerbohm, play cricket on the sands near Blackpool; and it was in Ireland, on that tour that we met Madame Markiewicz and her painter husband, a Russian of great good looks, who disappeared back to Russia at the beginning of the War. I remember his telling me that he had painted a portrait of the Empress, and when she sat to him at nine o'clock in the morning he had to appear and paint in full evening dress. He was then very jolly and thought he was very English, or Irish, and had one very Irish phrase which would carry him through any difficulty, and that was, 'Come along and have a bally drink'.

Madame Markiewicz was even then plotting, in the intervals of amateur acting, but I thought, and

think, the plotting began by being largely a pose and a desire for excitement, and developed almost by chance as it were into its terrible and deadly seriousness. I know that it was with intense amusement that she told us one day when we went to supper that she had one of the Larkin rioters hidden in the copper.

And for good or ill I can testify that her powers of political incitement and organization must have exceeded her gifts as an actress, or even in an impressionable country they must have equally failed.

CHAPTER VII

THE HAMMERSMITH VENTURE

It is a difficult task, especially in a book of reminiscences which are and must be essentially trivial, to deal with the War Period. How little the theatre and its politics seemed to matter then! how much less an obscure, middle-aged and seemingly quite useless person like myself! And yet, I think, apart from the question of immediate service, had a little more attention been paid to it in the years of peace, the theatre could have had its place, not unworthily. Even my own services, such as they were, could have been made a little better use of, than as a member of the Special Constables and of the United Artists' Rifles! In the latter regiment, so many of which found glory and alas, the grave, I certainly was in one sense a distinguished member, for I always seemed to be singled out for a special example of incompetence by every sergeant or inspecting general! In the constabulary duties I was perhaps a little happier, though I can recall no particular instances of fine service. I can remember the moment when my powers of sang-froid and reticence were called upon not without success, for in the early hours of the morning an elderly lady of the town would insist on attempting to open a conversation. My stern silence at last convinced her that I was on important duty and not to be disturbed, and she left me, turning round again at the corner to say, but quite politely, 'Yuss, and when the Germans get here, off goes your head, I

suppose, and on goes a turnip'! It seemed a nasty end, and I am glad that the prophecy was never fulfilled.

The actual effect of the War upon the theatres was entirely unexpected. It was believed at first that they would almost cease to exist—they changed hands at bargain prices, and I know of at least one family that lives at this moment in great comfort, because the head of it had the courage, possibly even the foresight, to take a long lease of a West End theatre at a price which in these days seems quite laughably small.

The managers who carried on made arrangements with their companies to act at nominal salaries. I was myself then once again with Tree, and he offered to share with us any possible profits. The unexpected happened. The young people of the country flocked to London to enlist, and there was an immense floating population with their evenings unoccupied. Consequently it was soon apparent that as long as the War lasted, the theatres would be filled to overflowing and also, unfortunately, that nobody was going to be very particular as to the quality of the entertainment provided, and the theatre passed into what may be roughly called the epoch of 'Chu Chin Chow'.

And here lies the minor tragedy of the situation. If people rushed to the theatre, some to escape from their unbearable thoughts, some because they had nothing better to do, it is obvious that if they didn't mind the fare provided being bad, they also would not have minded it being good. Had a National Theatre been in existence, it would have had, I believe, its full share of patronage, it could have set an example that would have been copied all over the

English speaking world, it would have taught a million people who do not think of these things without encouragement, the dignity and beauty that can be associated with drama and the theatre.

As it was, of course, the sturdy, commonsense, British view that the Arts are no concern of the leaders of the people, that they are best left to be dealt with in the hands of eccentrics and, where possible, foreigners, prevailed, still prevails, and may for all I know, continue to prevail. The old argument was used 'this is not a time for luxuries', though, as a matter of fact, the thing, then at any rate, could have been brought into being at a fairly nominal cost, and at least repaid in a bettering of civilization and good manners. But this is not the place to talk about the National Theatre, whose establishment I still hope to live to see.

It would not interest me, still less my readers, to recall my own professional activities during the war period. I acted in a lot of rubbish, sometimes with the noise of the Zeppelins to cheer me up. I was actually in a play at the St. James's when the first arrived during the last act. I rushed into the street as soon as I could, and enquired its whereabouts from an imperturbable policeman, who replied politely but without enthusiasm, 'Gone up Duke Street and turned to the left down Piccadilly'. I told this little true story to a Punch artist, who illustrated it, but the censorship would not allow the names of the actual streets to be mentioned, and dashes had to be substituted!

I had a long engagement with C. B. Cochran in revue and here I felt the final touch of degradation and inclined to leave the stage for ever. Don't,

please, mistake me, I do not mean that there is anything degrading about Cochran's entertainments in themselves. On the contrary, I think the English Theatre, such as it is, owes as much to him as to any man. For he has a real love of beauty and of colour, and he is always anxious and ready to call to his service the best stage decorators and musicians and writers. No, the degradation was merely personal to myself for I am an exceedingly third-rate revue comedian, and I felt I was only there because those who could do the job as it ought to be done, were more worthily employed. And I am afraid he must have thought so too, though personally he was always courtesy and kindness itself.

At the end of that engagement I left the stage for a while and retired to the country to study German, with the hope of passing an interpreters' examination. I talk German fairly fluently, but I soon found that I had only a very surface knowledge of it. I did, however, succeed in satisfying the examiners at the War Office and was offered an appointment just as the Armistice was being declared. And this is what 'I did in the Great War, Daddy'!

I am aware that the theatre people generally did an immense amount of work in the organization of entertainments for the wounded, in the collecting of money for St. Dunstan's and other Institutions, and perhaps I can humbly claim that here also I did my little share. But, though I make no complaint, I just feel that this was not enough and with proper organization and encouragement, beforehand if it was not possible during the stress of the struggle, it could have done a great deal more.

My first engagement after the War was to play at

the Royalty Theatre in a piece of Arnold Bennett's called 'The Title', and here it was that the greatest of my life's adventures began. I have told a part of them in my book, 'The Story of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith', published in 1925. That book is now out of print and I do not flatter myself that those that have read it will remember it in any detail, so I do not think any apology I have to make for repeating myself need be too profound.

I had for some time taken a particular interest in the 'production' in the theatre, a very strenuous craft, difficult to define, but which roughly combines, or should combine, the choice of a play, of the actors, of the scenic designer, of the composer of the music and the giving of advice to all of them, in some cases amounting to a collaboration. But I had really till then had comparatively little opportunity of exercising that craft, except in a small way. But during the War I was asked to supervise at a 'Russian Exhibition' in the Grafton Galleries some performances of a short play by Tolstoy, and a very poor play it is, called 'The First Distiller'. But for some reason Sir Thomas Beecham paid a visit to it and thought the production had merit, and he asked me to arrange for him a special revival of Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro'.

That was a remarkably interesting and altogether delightful experience. For one thing Beecham was determined to prove, and though it is still often denied by the ignorant and incurious, he most indubitably did prove, that if sufficient care is given to thinking out the details in every particular, opera in English, that is the translation into our own tongue of an opera written in another, can be a perfectly

reasonable and delightful entertainment. It is curious how in the politest circles this very question seems to arouse quite violent dissensions. You have your Mr. Jones who declares that opera can be dismissed altogether as a bastard form of Art, and that it is only when sentiments are too silly to speak that people take the trouble to sing them. Mr. Smith claims that operas should only be sung in the language of their origin, and that if you don't understand them so much the better for you, especially if the opera happens to be 'L'heure Espagnole'. Mr. Robinson, on the other hand, maintains that to listen to singing in anything but English and to pretend that you are pleased is merely an instance of social snobbery and hypocrisy; while the still, small voice of Mr. Brown mildly pipes the plea that there are Wagners and Handels, Purcells and Puccinis to be found playing the organ in every college chapel, unheard of and unsung. Between these disputants I should hesitate to set myself up as arbiter. It is undoubtedly true that the opportunities of expression have been in the past and still are denied to English composers. At the same time I cannot believe that were a really great writer of English opera to arise, he would not survive and fight his conquering way through all the difficulties, impenetrable as they may seem to be.

And of another fact I am equally certain. Opera as a form of Art depends upon its three attributes, music, production, by which I mean control of its presentation in acting, grouping and movement, and decoration, by which I mean scenery and lighting. And up to now in this country the two last have been entirely sacrificed to the first.

Personally I visit the opera seldom, and almost invariably come away long before it is over and thoroughly disappointed, because my aesthetic appreciation is shocked by this neglect. You frequently hear people—apparently quite intelligent and more than fashionable people—say, 'We only go to the opera to listen to the music. We don't care about the rest'. But this attitude is manifestly absurd: if the music alone satisfies then why should the producers go to the trouble and expense of providing the rest at all? And I stress this point particularly, because here is where English Art has, or should have, its opportunity. Whatever may be true of composers and singers, it is certain that English pictorial artists are supreme in the world of the theatre to-day. People may be surprised to learn that fact, but then they always are surprised and even slightly hurt if their attention is called to the fact that artists of any sort exist in this country. Only the other day a lady, with a most picturesque and knowledgeable face said to me, 'Who exactly is Gordon Craig, a scene painter, isn't he?' She had been intrigued by his romantic appearance in the reminiscences of Isadora Duncan, and this is quite a typical attitude. I would guarantee that in a general knowledge paper set in the schools of England, excluding the board schools in the Jewish quarters of the East End, where they are far more instructed, ninety per cent. would not have that knowledge of him.

But to return, after this digression, to my interrupted relation of this episode in Beecham's career.

We came to the conclusion first that the 'lyrics' if one may so call them, would serve as they stood, and indeed in the existing version they were on the

whole very well translated and very singable. But something had obviously to be done to make the dialogue more lively and actable, and I was commissioned to find somebody to carry out this task. I thought at once of Max Beerbohm, who was then in London, and we lunched together to consider the possibility. I left Beaumarchais' immortal classic with Max for the evening, but the next day he returned it to me, with the disastrous report that it might be a classic, it might be immortal, but that he found it so excruciatingly boring that it was quite impossible for him to read it. And I am not so sure that considered in its indigestible mass, he wasn't right. So then I went to my friend, H. M. Harwood, cotton-spinner, dramatic author, doctor of medicine, landowner, theatre proprietor, producer, athlete, and therefore never too busy to take on another little job. He completed in a very few hours an admirable and witty, if very free version, which I saw at once was what we required, and if I did see some proofs that, unlike Max, he did not essay the task of reading it all through, that did not detract from the merits of his work.

Hugo Rumbold, as admirable an interpreter of the eighteenth-century spirit, and above all its elegance, as Lovat Fraser, though his methods were very different, was commissioned to design the scenery. It was his idea, and I think a very logical one, that the action should be removed from Spain into France. For the genius of Beaumarchais is essentially French, and so are his characters. He merely called them Spanish to avoid difficulty with the censorship, and the danger of finding himself within the walls of the Bastille.

Sir Thomas had then a quite admirable company of singers, all of them English and admirably suited to the cast of this particular play, Frederic Austin for 'Count Almaviva', Frederick Ranalow for 'Figaro', Desirée Ellinger, and Miriam Licette to name no others.

Our rehearsals, unlike most opera rehearsals, were long and careful, and particular attention was paid to the speaking of dialogue and enunciation in the singing, so much so, that to everybody's surprise on the first night, they found themselves listening to the words as well as the music, and scarcely a point was missed.

The whole affair was really a sensational success, and I felt that if these results could be carried out in one opera, so they could in others. Alas, for reasons which are only too well known, the opportunity of trying again has never arisen. If they do not, quite apart, of course, from my own possible contribution, it will be another hideous waste of opportunity to sigh over. One can but hope for the best.

It was at least this production which led to my obtaining further experience, for among the critics who approved of it and wrote to say so with some firmness, was Arnold Bennett. I am not, unfortunately, a literary masterpiece, nor even a circulating novel, so this expression of opinion did not turn me at once into a best seller as a producer of plays, nor relieve my working life from all further anxiety. The precipice still continues to yawn below my antics on its edge. But it did lead to interesting developments, for Bennett was prepared to carry his approval into practical assistance, which was more than generous of him, and I look upon him if not as the founder of a

future which I have never achieved, at least as providing the chance of that future. I happened to be engaged, as I have said, whether at his suggestion or not, to play in a piece of his. It was not a strenuous part, in fact, I have now entirely forgotten what I was called upon to do. I only remember that I had continuous periods of repose in my dressing-room, and that he came on more than one occasion to visit me.

It so happened that I was at the moment occupying a part of my superfluous leisure in the thankless but too incessant task of organizing a charity matinée, and for this purpose I was searching for a little unwanted and cheap scenery which could be acquired and adapted for my purpose, and somebody told me that some 'flats' were being sold off cheap at a distant theatre called 'The Lyric Opera House, Hammersmith'. I had then, I think, never even heard the name of this theatre, and I certainly had no notion where it was to be found, though I did vaguely know the neighbourhood, because some friends of mine were in occupation of River House on the Mall, where for the past few years I have very happily lived. I went to the Broadway and after some inquiring solved its very round-the-corner whereabouts. To my astonishment I found that the presiding deity of the theatre was a young lady who had a year or two before indulged in amateur theatricals and had engaged me to coach her company. How she came to own the lease of the theatre I haven't the remotest idea, though she must have told me. Perhaps it had been in the nature of a bad debt. But I do remember her saying that it was not a profitable acquisition, for few people wished to rent it and when they did they

wished they hadn't. She herself had undertaken a show or two, but without much success, for the popularity of the bar was its chief, if not, its only attraction, and the glories of its history were in the past, in the golden age of melodrama. Then, indeed, it had been quite a paying proposition. And, after all, as a gilded programme on the wall and a foundation stone testified, it was only a year or two since it had been rebuilt and modernized and opened with an ode spoken by Mrs. Langtry—and very well spoken I have no doubt, though the ode was not so good. In any case she was about to sell it to a film company, and was to receive for her lease so much or at least so little. As she spoke a curious presentiment crept over me and without much thought I asked her if she could wait—was it two days or was it a week?—and I might be able to pay her five hundred pounds more. She agreed and there it was.

The only trouble that confronted me was that small as the sum required was, it happened to be considerably more than I possessed. Then I thought of my friend, A. B. Horne, a good man of business and a solicitor, with a perfectly lovely office, but no need or desire to practise his strange craft. Instead he amuses himself with periodical and brilliant descents into the theatrical arena under the pseudonym of Mr. Amner Hall. I called on him and told him that his ambition might at last, and for a trifling sum, be realized. He could become by the mere signing of a cheque, one of the most distinguished theatre proprietors in all Hammersmith. Oddly enough, the prospect did not seem to excite him quite as much as I had hoped. Nevertheless, so good is his nature, and as also I was standing in the way of a rather pressing

lunch engagement, he agreed, provided I would take steps to relieve him of his responsibility as soon as I could. This I undertook, and in a few weeks did fulfil. Meanwhile, he said, I could look upon the theatre as mine to deal with. And very proud I felt, but I did not at first see how one could deal with a theatre which was a long way off, and which every time I went to look at it seemed more and more difficult to find. Nevertheless, I had faith.

For one thing, and with that all the innumerable friends I took to see it agreed, it had its good points. It was, though reticent, really near a station, though it was even nearer the squeaking of the trains; it not only was a theatre but it looked like one, its decorations were deliciously rococo in the best mid-Victorian rococo-revivalist style, and the lines of sight and acoustics were perfect, the best in London, as they still are.

All this I told Bennett and he told me what to do next and breathed the blessed word 'Syndicate'. That is a word which always a little frightens me, I do not know its rules, I pronounce it with a blush, and it associates itself in my mind with 'An unbecoming frock, condemned to seven years for misappropriating stock', which are one and a half of two of the worst lines which Gilbert ever wrote. But it did not frighten Bennett and he saw no terrors and was determined to face all difficulties in the organization of one for the purpose of running this theatre, which, when he saw it, fired his imagination too. I knew no rich men or if I did, could not conceive of their parting with a fraction of their wealth for such a purpose, but he did and in three days our capital, our elaborate rules and all the city paraphernalia were complete.

He became chairman, our joint friend Alistair Tayler a director, and I managing director. Our contributors were largely millionaires, but our whole capital was very small—not enough to run a musical comedy for a week. Our intention was to run plays which we liked, for six weeks at a time, a scheme which our friendly neighbour, Mr. Mulholland of the King's, declared to be quite lunatic. I remember so well his saying to me that he believed there was a public for 'good stuff' in the neighbourhood, but only at the height of the best season could any play run for a fortnight. Shortly afterwards we had a twelve months' run with 'Abraham Lincoln', and a little later three and a half years with 'The Beggar's Opera'. But I am anticipating. We took over the theatre with no definite plan of action, at least no play in rehearsal and no cast engaged in November, and it was necessary to start operations with as little delay as possible.

Among my earliest visitors at the theatre, called to admire its possibilities, which faithfully if silently he did, was my friend A. A. Milne, then himself almost very young, and though he was already married, there was as yet no Christopher Robin to inspire his muse. He had his name yet to make as a playwright, though I had lately been acting in what I still think was the most delightful of all his works, 'Wurzel-Flummery', which had the odd experience of starting life as a three-act play, and ending after the shedding of its third, at its very best as a one-acter. I suggested to him that he should write for us a sort of Christmas entertainment, and the project had no terrors for either of us, though it was to be composed, cast, rehearsed, and produced within a period of about

four weeks. And 'Make-Believe' was the happy result. His collaborators were Mr. Burton (better known as 'Touchstone' of 'The Daily Mail'), whose songs were delicious, and a French composer who happened to live round the corner and could be easily got at. His music was really charming, I thought, though he himself whenever he produced a tune told me, 'Eet is the sort of nonsense you like n'est-ce-pas? Mon Dieu! eet is awful', and was only to be pacified by my promise, not yet fulfilled, that when the theatre was really successful, I would give a special performance of his five-act opera, which was called 'Souls in Torture' or some such name.

I have always flattered myself, and have been on that account flattered, that I have a special gift for 'spotting' talent, but I am not quite sure that there is not more opportunity than gift about it. And gift or no, it is a quality that has its painful reactions, for talent, when it is exposed, is attracted to the exposed situations—flies, to drop metaphor, from the seclusion of the Bradmore Grove to the garish lights of Piccadilly, so that my search is continuous, and the rubies in the mines tend to grow rarer. You will know what I mean when I tell you that in this first piece of ours appeared all these unknown to fame even in theatrical circles, Hermione and Angela Baddeley, Herbert Marshall and Leslie Banks, and that Claude Lovat Fraser, though there was no design about the scenery, assisted the very old gentleman with a long white beard, whom I found installed in the paint room, with modestly offered advice. I can't claim my old friend Kinsey Peile as a discovery or a novice, though he had been away from the stage and back to the army again for some years before he

Photo. Bertram Park

'TOMMY MAKE ROOM FOR YOUR UNCLE'

'RIVERSIDE NIGHTS'

assumed a fairy kingship in 'Make-Believe'. He is almost the only friend I have who, I have reason to believe, was really born before I was, but his enthusiasm in each new part is always so great that I always feel he is just from the Academy of Dramatic Art. And I intend this observation as a sincere compliment and not an innuendo. Nor can I claim Miss Jean Cadell as in any way my discovery, though I wish that I could. Her acting as the acidulated governess and the special art which she possesses of singing a song without a voice, nearly as miraculously, though differently, from my beloved Letty Lind of earlier days, almost alone made the performance of the play worth while.

The neighbourhood, in spite of its vicissitudes, had always been constant to the pantomime at Christmas, and 'Make-Believe', though it was not quite a pantomime, was readily accepted as such. Consequently, though I was prepared for it, my regime at Hammersmith never had to pass through as dismal a period as was experienced, for example, by Barry Jackson at Birmingham in his pioneer days, when evening after evening, the cast would outnumber the audience. Our performances for the four or five weeks about Christmas were massed and overflowing. The trouble, of course, with an entertainment of this kind, even if it is as attractive as 'Peter Pan', is that it is clearly not the mode to visit it when the turkey and plum pudding have become a mere memory, and life is again real and earnest. Consequently, the problem of 'paying off the production' has to be faced, and except with the utmost luck and economy, this cannot be done in one season. The provider must arrange that it be repeated year after year as

'Peter Pan' is. And this unfortunately could not be, or at any rate was not, done with 'Make-Believe'. In the first place in the succeeding years we happened to be faced with running plays which simply refused to be budged; in the second 'Make-Believe', though admirable in most of its scenes, had a very definitely weak last act, and though I have often entreated him to do so, and some day perhaps he will, Mr. Milne has never yet set himself to remedy that defect. Also I think he shares with myself a disinclination to return and revise, preferring to seek fresh woods and pastures new. And it must be confessed that the scenery and decoration and the dresses were hardly up to the standard which we afterwards set up for ourselves. Not that the designs of the dresses were not good, but they were carried out in the flimsiest materials, and very hastily, and I do not think I could bring myself to look upon what remains of them with any optimistic outlook. Moreover, I hate the idea of reviving a play, I mean one which I have produced myself, with an inferior cast. And its old cast, I need scarcely say, even if it were available, would now tax the resources of Sir Alfred Butt to re-engage, though one of our 'Savage Maidens', whose name was Betty Chester, would, I believe, return to me on her old terms, which were four pounds a week, in the spirit of patriotism!

Betty I had met, as quite a little girl, singing to wounded soldiers in the later part of the War. I remember her father being quite hurt with me for offering her a professional engagement. He was quite convinced that she had not the remotest chance of succeeding on the stage, and that to give her a start would merely put wrong ideas into her head. Which

shows that it is a wise father who knows his own daughter or can guess of what she is capable.

After the five weeks' run of 'Make-Believe', which gave the theatre some reputation and, counting all the initial costs of production and advertisement, only diminished our small capital by some twenty or thirty pounds, I began to consider a series of productions, each of which was to last three weeks or a month, a perfectly Herculean task to undertake, but I was fortunately not aware of quite all that it would mean. Nor, as I shall explain, was it eventually necessary. But it is the system on which theatres like the Liverpool Repertory Theatre are run, and the work is killing in its intensity. All the same a man like William Armstrong manages to do it somehow, and though he complains, he complains so amusingly, and looks so flourishing all the while, that nobody believes in his distress.

In my second production I played for safety during three-quarters of the evening, only letting my own fancy and inclinations run riot in the first fourth of the evening. 'The Younger Generation', by Stanley Houghton, was the one cheerful child of the Manchester School, by which I mean the Gaiety Theatre, under the patronage and control of Miss Horniman. With her it had always been a safe card to play in any moment of anxiety and stress. Of course the tiresome War had rendered the subject a trifle *démodé*, for what need is there in these later days for children to rebel against their parents, though so strongly does nature insist that they should, that their elders wisely provide purely imaginary grievances for them to kick against, in the way of growing exercises. You may frequently hear a child say to his mother, 'You be-

lieve in such and such a thing, *I* don't nor do any of my friends'. It is in vain for mother to answer, 'But I don't believe in it—I never did', for the child will answer, 'It's no use you saying you don't. I know better. You do, you do, you do'. And he will wax into a healthy rage and kick over a set of entirely non-existent traces. And so then, and even now, by the exercise of imagination, young people can see for themselves their parents portrayed to their satisfaction in 'The Younger Generation'. At any rate when we played it, and, though I say it, played it well, the young people came to the theatre, though not in overwhelming numbers, and laughed and applauded.

But it was really my first piece which found in its own little audience the foundation of that larger audience which one may call typically 'Lyric, Hammersmith', and which eventually grew to make the fame and fortune of the theatre, so far as one can claim with modesty that they have.

'La Serva Padrona' is, of course, a one-act opera composed by Pergolesi, with quite an amusing story for its basis, very cleverly translated for our purpose by Mrs. Lovat Fraser, the wife of the young designer, whose gay drawings and pictures of eighteenth-century life had made him known, in the small circle that cares for these things, even before the War.

Mrs. Lovat Fraser was a singer and dancer and played the chief part in it, together with Tom Reynolds and Reginald Berkeley, a fine baritone singer who now lives in America.

I took very great trouble in its production, giving it endless rehearsals, and so did Lovat Fraser, who designed its scenery and costumes, which Mrs. Fraser carried out, and Arthur Bliss got together for

us a good little chamber orchestra, thus starting at Hammersmith a tradition from which I have never departed, to have an orchestra that really does know how to play, however small it may be. I thought at the dress rehearsal that the whole affair was pretty good, though the music of Pergolesi is not to the taste of everybody—he does begin again and again just where you expect him to leave off, though I thought that I had made as far as possible a virtue of this idiosyncrasy. But the critics took very little notice of it—they are seldom inclined to say very much in favour of a one-act play, also, of course, it was the dramatic and not the musical critics who were invited to judge the entertainment as a whole. But, as I say, just a few people were delighted and invited me by their encouragement to further experiments in the same direction.

We started fairly well in the way of receipts but suddenly, and it was far from the only time that this happened, Hammersmith was isolated by a railway strike. When this occurs the astutest manager really does not know what to do. That is one of the many troubles of my nerve-racking profession. An empty theatre costs as much to look after as one that is three parts empty—that is one of the apparent paradoxes that has to be faced. Then you are faced with this dilemma. This theatre before the strike was liable to be nearly three-quarters full. Now it is less than one-quarter full. Can I find and put on in a week a play which would without a strike be pretty sure to attract a full house, and which, therefore, in a strike will half fill a house with people who, rather than miss it, will tramp from Hampstead or bicycle from Bermondsey? That is a solution, I suppose, but

I have never been so certain of a play that I can boldly try it. And there is another thing that during a railway strike might logically happen but never does. The neighbours cut off from the West, or shall I call it the East End, ought to flock to my theatre, disappointed as they may be at not being able to reach Daly's. But they never do. I suppose either it is a case of a prophet not being honoured in his own country, or that those neighbours who do care about the prophet all come to see him during the first fortnight in which he exposes his wares. In any case this first strike very nearly strangled the Lyric, Hammersmith, within a few weeks of its birth. But luckily not quite.

A friend of mine who had read, but not, as a matter of fact, seen 'Abraham Lincoln', suggested to me that, for a week or two's run, it would very much please the more serious among our possible patrons, and I agreed with her, and made up my mind to go and see it. The strike was now over, though the trains were uncertain in their comings and goings, and people seemed disinclined to believe that they could safely reach the Broadway. But there was a train to Birmingham and as I fondly, though erroneously thought, a train with a dining-car attached, which would get there just before the performance began. It didn't and it hadn't a dining-car, and I arrived at Birmingham long after the curtain had gone up, and extremely hungry. I am, I hope, prepared to be as ascetic as you like in the cause of Art, but you can't really judge the merits of a play on an empty stomach, which is, I take it, the first rule of the Critics' Circle, so, as I was late anyhow, I thought I could be just a little later and ordered a chop in the

railway refreshment room. The organization there was only just recovering and the chop too was late. The result was that I only reached the theatre in time to see the last five minutes of the play. But not too late, luckily, to recognize the type of audience that was being interested, to guess that it was akin to our own, and to judge its enthusiasm at the final curtain. In any case I saw Barry Jackson, who did not notice, or at any rate did not remark upon my arrival, and arranged with him to bring the piece lock, stock, and barrel on sharing terms to Hammersmith in the following week and for a whole fortnight. It came and stayed a year. But curiously enough it was neither immediately successful nor even during the long run *very* successful financially. I was often congratulated on the large fortune I had made out of it, but my innocence was not unfeigned. Its first matinée was the lowest, by far, that we have ever had in the theatre, and at the end of its fortnight it was a question whether we should struggle any more with it. But I have noticed, it is one of the few real 'curve' signs that I regard with any certainty, that, however small the beginnings, a play is likely to be a success if it continually goes 'up' and this 'Abraham Lincoln' always did. I mean, and my readers will forgive me for boring them with theatrical statistics, that I should always feel happier with a play that started (a first night always attracting some money) £79, £4 3*s*., £7 18*s*., £9 10*s*., than one which registered £123, £99, £98, £95, and so on. This seems fairly obvious, but few business managers will believe it; they will cry, 'The thing is paying steadily—what are you complaining about?' in the second case, and, 'My heavens we are ruined!' in the first, with unfailing

regularity. And business managers are always wrong whatever they say, but they look so confident and well-dressed that one always goes on believing them. And another fallacy I may as well expose while I think of the subject, and that is that the success or failure of a play depends upon times and seasons to any appreciable extent. This is really not so, according to my experience. The biggest 'Business' that was ever done at this theatre was at the beginning of the second year of the run of 'The Beggar's Opera', during a particularly scorching July and when two of the principal and most popular performers were absent on holiday. As I say, 'Abraham Lincoln' began badly and never rose, financially, to the heights of 'The Way of the World', or 'The Duenna', much less 'The Beggar's Opera', but after the first few weeks it paid a small profit and that profit remained steady for the whole of the rest of the year of its run. Its history in America was different. There it made a fortune for its author, but how great that fortune was I do not know and unfortunately I had no share in it, except in the pleasure that it gave to John Drinkwater, and that in any case I value highly.

It is a curious fact, and one which points to the vagaries and precariousness of the acting profession, that William J. Rea, who made so great a success as 'Abraham Lincoln', could not succeed afterwards in earning a respectable living as an actor. It was certainly through no fault of his own diligence, but of course his personality was very strong and individual. I am glad to say, however, that he has found for himself a useful position in another sphere of life.

Just as Rea was found fitted apparently for just that one part, so many people seemed to think that

Drinkwater could only write that particular kind of play, and that it was a kind which might rapidly go out of fashion. The latter part of this suggestion was perhaps true. His second play on 'Robert E. Lee' was, I know to my cost, not liked, or at any rate, not liked by a sufficiently large number of people, either here or in America. Personally, I belong to the small minority who thought it the abler play of the two, better written, sounder in its philosophy, more human and more touching and indeed, had it been produced first, this opinion might have been proved to be right.

But in the first they were demonstrably wrong. Drinkwater has had his failures, like most of us, but he has proved his capacity in light comedy, and at the moment in New York his 'Bird in Hand' is creating quite as much attention and success as 'Abraham Lincoln'.

At the end of the run of 'Abraham Lincoln' I turned my attention to a tragedy called 'John Ferguson', by St. John Ervine, whose 'Mixed Marriage' I had seen in Dublin and very much admired. Oddly enough, though when I read and acquired it I was unaware of the fact, it had romantically laid the foundations of the brilliant success of the New York Theatre Guild, which but for it would in all probability have come to an untimely end.

And to judge by the overwhelming enthusiasm of a crowded dress rehearsal, it might have done the same thing for me, though as a matter of fact it did not. It was remarkable for two magnificent and moving pieces of acting by Miss Moyna McGill and Mr. J. M. Kerrigan, but the Public, our Public at any rate, was not in the mood for nearly unrelieved

tragedy, and it had but a very short run, though it did not actually lose money. I hear as I write that another theatre is reviving it, and I should not in the least be surprised to hear with a great deal more chance of success, for it is a fine and sincere piece of work.

CHAPTER VIII

'THE BEGGAR'S OPERA': THE PLAY'S HISTORY

After 'John Ferguson' my next venture was a production of Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' and, though commercially it was unsuccessful, it was the one which I should most like to be remembered by, and the only one which I am very anxious, in a prosperous moment to revive, for I think it represents my work, such as it is, at its best, and I could do far more justice to the scenery and dresses which Lovat Fraser designed for it, since they were, in a spirit of economy, carried out in too cheap and rough a material to create the intended effect. Even as it was, they gave a great deal of pleasure to many people.

I may, perhaps, be forgiven for printing again, since it does the production more than justice, the notice of it written by the critic of 'The Spectator'.

'Mr. Playfair's production of "As You Like It" is an event. We have probably all of us from time to time regretted the fact that Shakespeare is dead, but I promise the reader that never will he have so heartily wished him alive again as on the day when he submits himself to the magic of "A May Morning World" by going to see Miss Seyler's Rosalind and Mr. Lovat Fraser's Arden. At last after innumerable Keans, Garricks, Irvings, and Beerbohm Trees have done their worst, the lovers again stand fresh in immortal beauty, just surely as the incomparable "scholar of the heart" imagined them. Alas, that he

cannot see his golden children and hear "the honey of their music vows".

'In all truth and soberness, the entertainment at the Lyric is, taken all round—play, players and the delight of the eye—nearer perfection than any stage production that I have ever seen. Probably Mr. Granville-Barker's production of "Twelfth Night" and the Russian Ballet's "Good Humoured Ladies" ought to be excepted, but I think that many people will rank Mr. Playfair's production quite as high, and some will prefer it.

'It is difficult to know where to begin to particularize in praise. Was it the dress or the acting that pleased most, the music or the scene? Or was it a certain extraordinary impression of vitality and sensibility? In the first place Mr. Nigel Playfair's methods succeed in leaving the audience with the impression that "As You Like It" is almost the greatest of Shakespeare's plays. Its humanity and sympathy and its charm are unrivalled. Its poetry is limpid and exquisite, like that of "The Tempest"; it is as well constructed as "Macbeth", and almost as metaphysical as "Hamlet", while in humour it equals "Twelfth Night". These facts are not, I think, striking to a reader of the play, but I think that anyone who had been to the Lyric would agree to this evaluation. Miss Athene Seyler as Rosalind and Mr. Herbert Marshall as Jacques made us conscious of the deep current of the philosophy of life which runs under the play, bearing up its exquisite fragility. Their acting was raised above that of the average of an extraordinarily good cast by their remarkable perception of this inner play. Rosalind and Jacques, they made us feel, were the two clairvoyants of the "Golden

World"—optimist and pessimist philosophers. Like Hamlet they hear the august harmonies of the lives of men and women, and are respectively moved to pity or stung to contempt for themselves and for those of less vision. But her finer conception does not cut Rosalind off from her kind. Unlike Jacques, she is more of an actor than an onlooker, and her active, restless spirit and her vivid sense of humour lead her inevitably into the part of *dea ex machina*. Mr. Marshall's remarkable acting gave a curiously bitter, almost sinister, value to the seven ages, that I thought had long ago been recited out of existence. Not only was his perception of blank verse values exact, but he completely comprehended the conscious anatomist of life.

'Of Miss Seyler it is difficult to write with the judicial moderation proper to my calling. Lovers of Shakespeare will understand what I mean when I say that she was Rosalind complete; not one turn of all those divine convolutions of gaiety, good humour, and tenderness did she miss. When she was gay she was ravishing, but when she grew tender, she was the pattern and quintessence of all lovers. I have only had the pleasure of seeing her once before. She was then the Frenchified lady in "Mariage à la Mode", and I guessed she could act, but wondered whether she would look, the part of Rosalind. But in Mr. Lovat Fraser's dresses she satisfied the eye completely. Mr. Lovat Fraser took late French medieval costume for the inspiration of a peculiarly gay and engaging sartorial "air with variations". His rather restrained and unobtrusive scenery was equally delightful, and I cannot sufficiently admire a certain simple but excellent and new dodge for

achieving "another part of the forest". The music—played on the stage by a quartet of pages—and one or two set pieces of grouping, were great features of the performance. As for the actors and actresses, their work, individually and collectively, completely satisfied and often surprised. Particularly delightful was their obvious appreciation of the blank verse. Space forbids discriminating in praise. I have therefore added a complete list of the cast, and offer my congratulations to all who propose to themselves the extraordinary pleasure of witnessing Mr. Playfair's production. Lovers of the drama who do not go to see "As You Like It" are laying up eternal regret for themselves. I personally shall go again and again.'

This play, contrary to my usual custom, was given at Stratford-on-Avon as a special festival performance before coming to Hammersmith, and there the result was quite astonishing. It seemed to be a simple affair enough, but the good citizens thought it Bolshevism or something worse. They turned their backs on me when they met me in the streets; I had changed the Memorial Theatre in their view into a place of desecration and decay; it was a wonder that some patriot did not consider the burning of it to the ground as the sole means of purification, a purification which came with a vengeance a few years later, but I don't think I had anything to do with that. I shall never forget the speech which Archie Flower made at the end of that festival. I think that he himself rather liked it than otherwise, but he, being, as he has to be, very much in the position of a constitutional monarch, did not want to tell his fellow-townsmen that they had been making, shall I say, much ado about nothing, nor did he want to offend his actor guests. So he ten-

tatively began, 'What shall I say about "As You Like It?"'—expecting, very naturally, to be guided by a storm of cheers and counter cheers. Instead his question was received with a deathly silence as from the grave. And so he merely said nothing or at least nothing very much to the point.

In London the reception was much less sensational, though a good many critics, amateur and professional, talked about 'futurism'. And the odd thing was that so far were the dresses from being futurist that they were the most realistic that Fraser ever attempted. The lines and the colours were all very carefully copied from contemporary missals, contemporary that is with the supposed date of the action of the play, which we arbitrarily, but quite justifiably, chose to be the latter half of the fourteenth century. And I must not forget in making this brief record that one of the great causes of offence at Stratford was that I did not allow a very ancient stuffed stag to be carried on in the Forest Scene, a stag that was kept in the Museum for the purpose, and was expected to make its appearance. One must not of course flout the traditions of a particular theatre. Who was it who told me that he was appearing as quite an ordinary man of his own age at an East End theatre, and replied in answer to a question of his dresser that he did not propose to wear a wig? The dresser was horrified. 'I shouldn't do that if I were you, Sir! They look for a wig here.'

But alas, the Hammersmith audiences, up to the present, have shown no great interest in Shakespeare, however produced, and 'As You Like It' ran to very mediocre houses for only about six weeks and to my personal very great regret.

The rest of this chapter, and some at least, if not all, of the chapter that follows must, I think, be devoted to 'The Beggar's Opera', though I feel, to tell the truth, a little chary at launching out once more into its history and an account of its revival at Hammersmith, for the simple reason that I cannot possibly find anything to say that has not been said before in one form or another. At the same time those who purchase (or borrow) this book will certainly expect to find it done, and I must not disappoint them, and those who already know all about it I tell quite frankly the pages that they can conveniently leave uncut.

To begin at the beginning:

There was a certain amount of controversy, both in the eighteenth century and since, about the actual purity of authorship of the opera. Gay wrote it and signed it, but there is little doubt that Swift and Pope had a hand in a song or two—probably no more; although at the time there were plenty of jealous people ready to affirm that Gay could not have written it at all, and to put it down to Pope. Colley Cibber (who had reason to make catty remarks about the opera), on seeing a knife lying on the table with the name of the manufacturer, Gay, on it, exclaimed, 'Oh, so Mr. Pope makes knives, too!'

Pope and Gay had already collaborated in 'Three Hours after Marriage'.

But to set against popular deduction, there is Pope's own explicit statement: 'Gay was the sole author of "The Beggar's Opera". I own appearances are against him, for it was written in the same house with me and Dr. Swift. He used to communicate the parts as he wrote them to us, but neither of us did any more than alter an expression here and there'.

Photo. Bertram Park

FREDERICK RANALOW AND ROSE HIGNELL
IN 'THE BEGGAR'S OPERA'

As for the original idea of the opera, it is generally accredited to Swift; but it was rather a remark of Swift's which engendered the notion in Gay's brain than that Swift himself conceived it. Swift suggested to Gay that 'A Newgate Pastoral might be an odd pretty sort of thing' (and one can well imagine what an odd pretty sort of thing it would have been in Swift's own hands!); Gay about this time had lost every penny in the 'South Sea Bubble', and his ears were acock for suggestions for restoring his fortunes. But the idea as Gay produced it was not only not Swift's, but did not win Swift's approval: when Gay sketched to him his conception of a Beggar's Opera, Swift was very doubtful as to whether it could be done. But Swift's 'Newgate Pastoral', which would probably have been one of the grimmest plays ever written, would certainly not have had Gay's success; for the theatre public, at any rate, has little patience with those who come

> Vice to revile,
> Sin to exile.

There are other sources, too, to which one can trace the idea as well as Swift's suggestion. Notably, of course, there is the execution of Jack Sheppard, and the tremendous stir it made. Throughout the autumn of 1725, Sheppard kept all London breathless with excitement by his repeated escapes from prison; and when he finally took the road from Newgate to Tyburn, it was more like a coronation procession than an execution. Indeed it ended in a riot. A rumour got around that the body of the popular hero was to be given for dissection; so the crowd mobbed the undertaker and carried off the body to an ale-

house in Long Acre to lie in state. The next day the riot was worse, and the magistrates had to apply for a party of foot-guards. The body was recovered and handed over, apparently, to Sheppard's personal friends; 'and the same night about ten it was interr'd in an Elm Coffin at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, with a velvet paul over it, and the funeral service performed, etc., the guards marching on each side of the coach in which the coffin was carry'd with bayonets fix'd at the ends of their muskets.' Within a few months biographies of Sheppard were on sale in every book shop: even Defoe wrote one. A Sheppard harlequinade was produced at Drury Lane; and a play, 'The Prison-Breaker, or The Adventures of John Sheppard', was written and 'intended to be acted at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields'. All arrangements, indeed, were made for the play's production, but it never saw the boards. That Gay was, to a certain extent, indebted to it for his idea one cannot deny, but he so completely eclipsed what he imitated that the 'Prison-breaker' has hardly been heard of since. One might say that the debt of an opera to a play is bound to be slight—not so great, for instance, as the debt of one play to another might be. But one must remember that in the eighteenth century the term 'opera' was not nearly so rigid in meaning as it is now: almost anything was described as opera, and, at the success of the Italian opera then introduced into England, managers were naturally anxious to incorporate the word in the title of a piece if they could conceivably do so. There is a story that at the first night of 'The Beggar's Opera' the audience grew restive at the absence of an overture, and 'Lockit' was shoved through the cur-

tain to pacify them. He lost his head, and all that he succeeded in saying was, 'Gentlemen, you know very well that one never has music with an opera!' That remark brought the house down; but it was not quite so absurd as it now sounds, and there is good reason to believe that when Gay first wrote his 'Beggar's Opera' it *had* no music! There was singing, of course, but it was to have been unaccompanied. It was the Duchess of Queensberry, who took a lively interest in the rehearsals, who first suggested the introduction of an orchestra. 'The Beggar's Opera' without music does not sound attractive—but as a matter of fact, it was obviously a good enough play to stand intact, and it was occasionally played without music in the provinces and in fit-ups as late as the middle of the nineteenth century.

That brings one to another question—the allotting of credit for the music. It is frequently said that Gay composed 'The Beggar's Opera'. That, of course, is a considerable over-statement. As far as there was any composing at all, it is supposed to have been done by Dr. Pepusch. But Dr. Pepusch was a very unlikely person: he was a typical example of the dry-as-dust type of musician—'very humdrum', wrote Mrs. Delaney—a German, who had formerly been a Court musician at Berlin, but had left that city through dislike of the reigning family, and settled in England, which he found a sadly barbarous country in musical matters, and which he felt it was his duty to instruct in German methods and ideals. It is a curious bit of irony that the most creditable thing to his name should be one of the most purely English opera scores, and, to his mind, one of the

most barbarous types of music that have ever been written!

Probably the credit is threefold. The Duchess suggested that music should be written, Gay chose the tunes (making free use of Purcell and even Handel in the process), and Pepusch did the donkey-work of scoring and harmonizing, probably not without protest.

There is good reason for thinking that the tunes were chosen by Gay himself. His connection with the noble company of ballad-singers is well known: both he and Swift wrote many of the most popular street-ballads of that time, and it was largely through this that Gay secured his *entrée* into mendicant circles. Not only had he a unique opportunity of seeing the life he wrote about at first hand, but he would be bound to have all the popular tunes of the day at his finger-tips. He was, moreover, a distinguished amateur of music, as witness his couplet from 'Trivia':

> Then Handel strikes the strings, the melting strain
> Transports the soul, and thrills through every brain.

and a player of the then fashionable flute.

There is just one more question which requires discussion before I turn to actual event. It has been frequently stated, and especially in the newspapers, that Gay wrote the opera as a parody on the Italian Opera of the day. I think what I have said of the history of the actual writing will show this to be false. If one is trying to parody a certain sort of music, one does not simply introduce music as an afterthought. If Gay's intention had been to parody Italian Opera it was certainly easy game, with its extraordinarily rigid conventions and the vast element of the ridiculous that was in it already. It was (some of it) indeed, almost its own best parody: the

very slightest tinge of the extra-ridiculous would have set all London laughing, and probably have dealt a very shrewd blow to the propriety of the behaviour of audiences at the serious operas themselves.

Don't run away with the idea, though, that all the Italian operas—or rather, operas with Italian libretti—were in themselves ridiculous. Queer to us, with our modern notions of scenery and dresses, they might indeed appear; but to suppose that there was anything essentially ridiculous in Handel's 'Rinaldo' and 'Julius Caesar' is absurd, as could very easily be proved were performances of them to be given with the same scenic designs as were used in his day. It is a thousand pities that economic conditions at present seem to render such experiments impossible.

But 'The Beggar's Opera' is something quite different. It is not a parody so much as a rival. That it exhibits a certain contempt for Italian Opera goes without saying, for it is certainly no imitation of it; but it stood on its own legs—it was not simply engaged in trying to knock the legs from under something else.

Although not in intention a parody, in effect 'The Beggar's Opera' proved the doom for the moment of 'outlandish music' in England. But it did so by honest rivalry, not by assassination. When it was put on, the so-called Royal Academy of Music (which was, in fact, a vast grand opera syndicate in which the King himself had taken shares to the value of a thousand pounds), was in a most flourishing condition. It engaged the exclusive services as composers of Handel, Bononcini, and Ariosto, and had certainly the exclusive support of the fashionable world, to the great detriment of the legitimate actors, whose theatres languished into obscurity. But within

one short year of the production of 'The Beggar's Opera' the tables were turned: the syndicate was bankrupt: Handel was defeated by Dr. Pepusch—or rather, by folk song—and rococo palaces were found less attractive than the Old Bailey. As one indignant Italian wrote plaintively to a friend: 'This simple Signor did tri to pelt mi countrymen out of England with lumps of pudding'—'Lumps of Pudding' being the air to which was set the final chorus and dance. And out of England 'Lumps of Pudding' *did* pelt them! Like 'Lillibullero', it was an immensely popular melody in the eighteenth century; but like 'Lillibullero', curiously enough, it never attained any wide popularity in our production, although they were both liked well enough.

It is a strange thing—this—the way the balance of popularity shifted from one air in the opera to another with the lapse of time. We did not use 'Lillibullero' at all in our original production, but in the revised version we set 'The Modes of the Court' to it. Taking the tip from Uncle Toby, I had the tune whistled by the chorus. But somehow it never caught on: the stage-hands and the young people down our alley, who used to whistle 'Over the Hills' and 'Before the Barn Door Crowing' till I almost prayed to be struck deaf, never whistled 'Lumps of Pudding' or 'Lillibullero'. And yet, in the eighteenth-century production, 'Before the Barn Door Crowing' fell quite flat, and was soon omitted altogether, while with us it was by far the most popular number in the piece! Nor was it only the accompanying 'business' which accounted for its success with us, for I am afraid the children of the neighbourhood had not much opportunity of learning our tunes except by

listening in the passage-way by the stage-door: to them 'The Beggar's Opera' was as devoid of visible action as a radio-play, and their choice might be taken as a very fair criterion of the quality of popularity in a piece of music.

Nor, indeed, do I wish that my reputation, such as it is, should be connected too much with its revival. Had I regulated my theatrical life and work just as I had wished, my theatre would never have allowed any of its revivals or productions, following the good example of the Theatre Guild in New York, to run for more than six weeks at the outside. But unfortunately I was obliged to add to my small capital wherever I could, and it is entirely due to 'The Beggar's Opera' that the Lyric has enjoyed so comparatively a long life. Into its long history I cannot bring myself to enter again, or at least only in so far as it has its effect upon my own revival of it. To those who are interested in it, I would recommend the borrowing of my former book, 'The Story of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith', where I have written it all down as carefully and as accurately as I could. The main point is that it has really never failed, when reasonably produced, to be a success. This much I knew before I attempted it.

Congreve said of it: 'It will either take greatly or be damned confoundedly.' There is a tradition that it was touch-and-go which would happen until it came to 'Polly's' song:

> Oh, ponder well, be not severe,
> So save a wretched wife;
> For on the rope that hangs my dear
> Depends poor Polly's life.

but that that song brought the house down. It is an

odd story, if true. That there has really been so great a change in taste—that an eighteenth-century audience was so much quicker than a modern one to appreciate delicate points I find it difficult to believe. Now, that song, exquisitely sung as it was at our performance by Sylvia Nelis, never evoked more than a mildly amiable response; nor would I, as a producer, have expected it to do so. The tune is gently appealing, rather than provocative; and the words, charming as they are, seem to me to have an appeal more literary than dramatic—to be more effective in the study than on the stage. I don't know what the authority for the tradition is, but I cannot help suspecting it to be traceable to someone who read the play in his own armchair, rather than someone who stood in the pit that first night.

Probably what was far more responsible for its immediate success than the gentle appeal of 'Polly's' singing was its political satire. The attitude of the eighteenth century towards satire was curious: when His Majesty's Government was attacked at all, it was generally attacked in the most violent and scurrilous libels. To poke fun at it, as Gay did, was something new, and horrified some honest constitutional souls, who considered (or, at any rate, publicly professed to consider) it was rank blasphemy to treat His Majesty's Government in anything but the most serious manner.

> When you censor the age
> Be cautious and sage,
> Lest the courtiers offended should be:
> If you mention vice or bribe,
> 'Tis so pat to all the tribe,
> Each cries, 'That was levelled at me!'

wrote Gay, boldly ironical, for he knew that the audiences were ready enough to see personal satire none the less—probably might see more, even, than there was. And plenty of definite personal allusions there were: Robert Walpole, in particular, was attacked, especially in the character of 'Robin of Bagshot'; but with true political cunning he turned the darts harmless away by leading the applause with the most evident relish—and by taking steps that nothing written by Mr. Gay, on at all the same model, should ever see the boards again.

This was, of course, the reason why Gay's sequel, 'Polly', was never performed during the author's lifetime, luckily I think, for his reputation. I did present a version of 'Polly', very much and very skilfully altered by Clifford Bax, at the Kingsway Theatre, and later at the Savoy, under the management of my friend Bobby Pitt-Chatham, and with considerable success, a success that was more due perhaps to external causes than any intrinsic merit of the work itself. For one thing 'Polly' herself was played and sung by a most fortunate discovery, Miss Lilian Davies, then the music was most skilfully arranged by Austin, with even happier results, I think, than he had achieved at Hammersmith, and that is saying a great deal, there were some lovely dresses and scenery designed by William Nicholson, and last but not least, Lord Rothermere, a great friend of Pitt-Chatham's, brought all his powerful influence to bear upon its publicity, both beforehand and during its run.

There has been lately some talk of 'The Beggar's Opera' being adapted for the purposes of a talking picture and, indeed, such rights as I possess have

been acquired by a well-known firm. But though we have had conversations, and I have given what advice I could, nothing has yet been done. For one thing, the public is not considered to be ready for anything but romance realistically treated, and 'The Beggar's Opera', whatever else it is, is certainly not a romantic story of a Highwayman and a Maid. The 'Talkie' people consider that that is what it must be even if it isn't. I differ. And the thing is in abeyance. Personally I consider that the general intelligence of the Public, of that Public at least which frequents the picture palaces, is vastly underrated, and that a fortune attends the first person that finds that out. But my advice as to the best means of making pictures is not usually treated with much seriousness, it being, I suppose, rightly considered, that I have not set much of an example myself.

The popularity of 'The Beggar's Opera' waned, of course, in the nineteenth century: as someone said during that time, 'The scruple of the present refined age may well hesitate to admit the moral pretensions of this work'. Trust the nineteenth century for that! But it was revived in the West End in 1870 at the Gaiety (with a male impersonator, of course); and the last complete revival was at the Avenue (now the Playhouse) in 1886, with Sims Reeves as 'Macheath', though he, I am sorry to say, introduced much extraneous matter and sang songs that must have been grossly out of keeping with his character. The first act, however, was given—and very charmingly given—in a sort of eighteenth-century revue at the Little Theatre in 1913 by Mr. Bertram Forsyth.

But we certainly thought that ours was the first performance of it in Hammersmith, until we found

that even there we had been anticipated; Mr. Horne, my manager, discovered a play-bill of a run of three weeks at the 'New Theatre, Hammersmith', in 1783. No one knows where the New Theatre was: apparently it opened its fortunes with 'The Beggar's Opera', which it followed presently with 'She Stoops to Conquer', but after that it was never heard of again.

It was not only in the way of length of run that 'The Beggar's Opera' created an eighteenth-century record. Lavinia Fenton, as 'Polly', was the first actress to marry into the peerage; being carried off by the impatient Duke of Bolton when his first wife was still on her death-bed.

But Lavinia was not the only 'Polly' who married into the peerage: indeed, it became almost a habit. Mary Catherine Bolton and Catherine Stephens, two successors in the part, both married into the peerage too. I feel it to be the one blot on our production that none of our 'Pollies' now are duchesses, as they certainly richly deserve to be—quite as much as Lavinia and Mary and Catherine.

It is, no doubt, the general opinion that 'The Beggar's Opera' is a play of 'the most revolting cynical order'; and it is a little difficult at first thinking to reconcile the delight which is taken in it by all sorts and conditions of people with the view of the critic who adds to this statement that 'a play without a moral is, and never can be anything but a monstrosity, as Shakespeare and all the great dramatists have always known'. He thinks that the music is its redemption, and that without it would be unbearable.

I do not wish for one moment to detract from his

praise of the music, but the conclusion that he comes to is surely a false one, and is unfair to the peculiar genius of Gay.

I believe it to be true that his intention was to write a merely cynical work; but even authors of genius are apt to be led away from their intentions.

What happened in Gay's case is very much what happened to Charles Dickens, when he set out to write 'The Pickwick Papers'.

'Pickwick' in the early chapters is a mere butt. 'Polly' at her first entrance is a mere wanton. But in both cases the authors conceived an affection for their subjects and they suffered a sea-change.

'Polly', who directly she comes on the stage, speaks these lines:

> I know as well as any of the fine ladies how to make the most of myself and of my man, too. A woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a Court or an assembly. We have it in our natures, Papa.

is as different from the 'Polly' of the touching later scenes of the play as the 'Mr. Pickwick' of the smoking concert at the club is from the dear old gentleman in retirement. You will remember that anecdote of Lamb's (disinterred with loving recurrence by Mr. E. V. Lucas, and not disdained by Sir James Barrie) about 'cheerfulness breaking through'. Somehow I feel that Mr. Gay, with every desire to be uncompromisingly atrocious, could not help allowing *Virtue* to break through, and optimism as well, in spite of himself. Incidentally, the same is true of Mr. Congreve and his 'Millamant'.

What is more cheerful to consider than the fact

that, amongst the most hideous circumstances and surroundings, the fair flower of a disinterested love can be tended and flourish? And 'Polly's' love for 'Macheath' is disinterested to a fault. It is not even disturbed by the fact that she has to share it, not only with 'Lucy', but with at least four other doxies.

CHAPTER IX

'THE BEGGAR'S OPERA': THE 'LYRIC' PRODUCTION

LET ME state at once officially and categorically (for there have been Lambert Simnels and Perkin Warbecks in the field) that the sole originator of the notion of my revival was a kitchenmaid whose name, with blazing infidelity, I have forgotten. She taught me the words and the music, and the business of 'Over the Hills and Far Away' when I was five years old; and consciously or sub-consciously, ever since those distant days I had been determined to acquire a knowledge of the rest of the play, and share it with as many of my fellow citizens as I could induce to join me.

More immediately, however, a momentary interruption in Sir Thomas Beecham's career was the cause.

''Twas in the prime of summer-time, an evening calm and cool' (not to say infernally wet and chilly), when Frederic Austin was good enough to come, as was his frequent wont, and take a dish of tea and a couple of fly biscuits in my luxurious (if somewhat draughty) office. He gave me the tragic information that a reputable opera company was out of a job—and likely to remain so for some time. I answered that an equally respected theatre was also likely to be shortly disengaged. I don't know whether we discussed the possibility of diminishing 'Boris Goudonov' or 'Tannhäuser' to the capacities of a theatre which can dress twelve people with difficulty and

give bowing room to an orchestra of fourteen at a pinch; but at any rate 'The Beggar's Opera' came to the surface in the course of our conversation, and he jumped at the idea.

So I routed a dusty copy out of my cupboard: we rushed to the wreck of what had been a piano, and he proceeded to play to me the melodies arranged by the good Pepusch with figured basses and all. 'Over the Hills and Far Away' soon came out very much as I suspected it would. 'If the Heart of a Man is depressed with Care' recalled to me distant thoughts of the kitchen lancers of my youth. The rest of the music, I must confess, suggested a series of Low Church hymn tunes—the sort of hymn tunes which make a man feel when he attempts to sing them that he must be suffering from incipient tonsilitis—but Austin cared for none of these things.

'You wait', he cried, 'till I have quickened up what Pepusch designed to be slow, till I have harmonized him out of all knowledge, and harnessed a string quartette and a harpsichord, and a something de Gamba, and a what-d'you-call-it d'amore to their tasks . . .!'

I had a touching faith (which, strangely enough, I still retain) in the transmogrifying powers of Frederic Austin; and I believed him.

It is of world-shaking importance, of course, to get my chronology correct; and I think that the second factor in the undertaking was Frederick Ranalow. Somehow, even when I was producing 'The Marriage of Figaro' for Sir Thomas, there flashed across my mind more than once that Ranalow was born to play 'Macheath'; and so convinced was I of it when Austin and I were talking that I swept aside with ruthlessness

his timid suggestion that opera tradition, Pepusch, the claims of harmony and other nuisances, demanded a tenor voice for the dashing hero—and you will agree with me that I was splendidly right.

At any rate, without a moment's delay he was summoned to join our conclave. The notions which he cherished in regard to a weekly salary were airily dismissed. Standing with my back to the window (so excluding some of the unwelcome wild north-easter), I proclaimed firmly that we were well in the middle of the dog days, and the call of the hedgerows and other summer delights would prevent all but a very few enthusiasts from coming to our theatre, sing he never so attractively. Something in the nature of a percentage which should begin to soar in the realms of the unlikely was suggested to him. Ranalow was bewildered, but good-naturedly acquiescent.

The next thing to be tackled was the Book of the Words, and I undertook, on behalf of the other interested parties, the herculean task of reading it through—a task which, I can assure you, took a great deal of faith, hope and trust in the judgment of critics dead and gone (but a great deal wiser than myself). For to tell you the truth, to people who are in the habit of keeping themselves alive on a light diet, 'The Beggar's Opera' swallowed at one sitting, just as Gay wrote it, is a pretty indigestible dish! I can claim the merit of recognizing its plums; but I came very often very near to being choked by its suet. I'm not quite sure what a colander is, but I felt that some such implement must be wielded at once to reduce its density; and this function I decided to entrust to Arnold Bennett. I am happy to

NIGEL PLAYFAIR

A CARICATURE BY KAPP

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say that he saw very quickly how it could be done; and more readily than I did, I think, he recognized the splendid quality of Gay's work. At any rate, within a couple of days 'The Beggar's Opera' had been analysed, dissected, and put together again by him, and we had a version ready to be put to the test of rehearsal.

Austin was locked up in a room (without, I am afraid, the two bottles of claret and the plate of anchovy sandwiches which Sheridan enjoyed in a similar situation) to complete his musical arrangement. And from that room during the rehearsals proceeded at intervals his score. Nellie Chaplin and her sisters and the orchestra worked with us; for it is to be noted that from the first conception of the production to the first performance there was only possible an interval of five weeks!

My next step was to secure the rest of the cast; and here again I had largely recourse to the members of Sir Thomas Beecham's company. 'Peachum' was to be played by Frederic Austin himself. How he ever managed to learn his part and rehearse and write his music at the same time is, as I look back upon it, simply the eighth wonder of the world! But somehow it was done—and as I write he is still very much alive, and working, if anything, a little harder still. Indeed, that is really the only very grave complaint I have against him, for I always find that when those friends with whom one is in constant touch work too hard, it is almost as fatiguing to oneself as to them! He is, however, not selfish in other ways, so I will let this pass.

Miss Sylvia Nelis, whom I was absolutely determined to see, and no other, as 'Polly', required a great

deal of persuasion. She assured me over and over again that though she could sing a little sometimes, she was an entirely incapable actress, and that the presence of an audience terrified her beyond measure. I shortly discovered, however, that what she meant by not being able to act was not being able to indulge in all the preposterous antics which are usually known as acting on the Grand Operatic Stage; and as for being terrified by an audience, she proceeded to contradict what she had said by giving me an entrancingly amusing exhibition of these antics—with eyes cast up to heaven, and her arms extended in an agony of expectation. I assured her that she would be severely reprimanded if she attempted to do any of these things or indulge in any of that sort of acting as 'Polly' in 'The Beggar's Opera'! Indeed, I told her that she would scarcely ever have to move at all, and that her head could always be held modestly downwards. At last, to my joy, she relented; and if there is nothing else to my credit, I can at least claim to have given the world an example of one perfect piece of casting, for I cannot believe that Lavinia Fenton, even, can ever have been better than Sylvia Nelis at her best.

From the Beecham Opera Company came also Wynn, our first 'Lockit'; and Alfred Heather, born, so I think, to play 'Filch'—and born to keep us all amused and optimistic when rehearsals seemed likely to become a little too strenuous.

Violet Marquesita, who played 'Lucy', Providence very politely arranged to place next to me at a dinner party within a day or two of our deciding to produce the play. She was so obviously 'Lucy' that I think that I opened the subject of 'The Beggar's Opera'

with the soup, and settled her contract before the removal of the fish.

But perhaps the most unexpected find of all was Miss Elsie French. Miss Elsie French is a young Irish lady, who, for some years had played 'principal boy' in provincial pantomimes at Christmas time, and during the rest of the year had executed sailors' hornpipes and such other delights in touring revues. She came to see me, I think, first when we were just going to put on 'John Ferguson', and told me that she had a great desire to gratify more legitimate ambitions. I think it was merely because she happened to arrive at that particular moment, and because she was bright and had a kind face, that I engaged her to understudy Miss Maire O'Neill. I could only guess what her talents might really be; but she had an opportunity of playing the part once or twice, and played it extremely well. All the same, I hadn't originally the remotest intention of entrusting 'Mrs. Peachum' to her. I engaged her to continue understudying, but designed that part for Miss Rosina Filippi. Miss Filippi, however, though very kindly willing to help, as she always is, was so busy with her classes that she said she could only come to a limited number of rehearsals; and I felt that in this particular play such an arrangement could never be satisfactory. But, while I was looking round for somebody else, Miss French was reading the part, and I soon discovered to my joy, that it was unnecessary to look any further.

The 'Ladies of the Town' all appeared miraculously at auditions which we held in spare moments during the first few days of rehearsals. I only recall an amusing adventure with regard to Miss Nonny

Lock, our lovely and graceful 'Jenny Diver'. I was asked by a lady, whose name I have forgotten, to witness a class of her pupils, who performed a sort of impromptu play in which all their talents were to be shown off to the best advantage. Among them was Miss Nonny Lock. I was at once struck with her particular charm, and offered her the part. It afterwards appeared that she had been on the stage from childhood, and had only taken the part in which I saw her at the last moment in the place of a real pupil who had fallen ill!

Of the actual rehearsals, I am afraid I can recall very little. The particular method of the delivery of the words and the songs (of which our constant audiences have been good enough to approve) were merely a deduction from the pictures of that period and the period that followed—largely, of course, Hogarths and Zoffanies. How far it approximated to the methods of the original production it is impossible for me to say, nor do I think it a matter of very great moment. One is out, I maintain, in reproducing old plays, not so much to give a replica (which is impossible) as to furnish a sort of review and criticism—a *parody* if you like, but a parody which expresses admiration and not contempt.

I must tell you, in passing, that Sir Thomas Beecham himself of his own free will came to nearly all our rehearsals, and gave me every sort of help and encouragement. It is no little tribute to his powers of self-sacrifice in the cause of English music that he, who loves the good things of life, was usually to be found that summer lunching off toasted cheese and a mug of beer in the refreshment rooms of the Metropolitan Railway Station at Hammersmith!

And now I come to Lovat Fraser. There was, of course, no question, quite apart from the fact of his love for the Lyric, Hammersmith, but that he should design the scenery and dresses; and I am glad to doubt if anything in his life could have given him greater happiness than this opportunity. It was the period which he adored. He had a vast knowledge of its life and of its literature—far greater, indeed, than any that I could ever pretend to. He not only knew 'The Beggar's Opera' intimately, but there was hardly a play of the eighteenth century which he had not read and did not remember. For many of them, indeed, he had completed elaborate designs without any hope that they would be seen upon the stage. I don't think that he had done this in regard to 'The Beggar's Opera': but I knew (or thought) it would give him no difficulties. Nor, in a sense, did it; but both of us in our enthusiasm failed to face from the beginning the economic question. When it did come to be faced it caused much heart-searching and turmoil. But from the ashes of all his beautiful original designs, which were destroyed a fortnight before the actual date of the production of 'The Beggar's Opera' arose that method (of providing a background of scenery suitable in form for all revivals of classical plays) which has created something of a revolution in the English theatre, and has given new pride and new hope to those who work for and believe in it. Don't let me be misunderstood. Lovat was much too skilled a craftsman to design anything that was unworkable, or, even from a pictorial point of view, unsuitable for our small stage; but the scenery which he originally produced for 'The Beggar's Opera' was comparatively elaborate, and could

only be used with the help of a very large stage staff, and it required great skill and long hours of labour in its building.

His original sketches (which for the purposes of allegory I have reduced to ashes, though, as a matter of fact, I think they are still in the possession of Grace, his wife), I will not attempt to describe. I only know that at the time I thought them perfection. But they wouldn't do, and I had to tell him. I did it very bluntly. It was the only way. I remember quite well even the words I used. I said: 'Lovat, the whole damn thing has got to be done somehow in one scene, and you've got to produce that scene by to-morrow morning.' I know his face went white, and I know his voice went husky, for he was a pretty tired man even then, but he only said: 'All right.' I think it was at one o'clock next morning he rang me up and said: 'I've found the way', and I knew by the sound of his voice that it would be all right indeed. I hope I was not conscious of having set him an impossible task. I think I had brought him myself a sort of ground plan which would make the thing work: but to him alone is due all the credit of the ingenious idea, of the model which suggests (though it makes no attempt realistically to reproduce) eighteenth-century architecture, and of the little gadgets and hangings which make the model change from an exterior to an interior at will. (You will see it reproduced in one of our illustrations; but those people who are really fond of these things should pay a visit to the theatre-room in the South Kensington Museum, where an excellent scale model is exhibited. The chandelier, by the way, was suggested and designed by Gordon Craig, who happened to be paying

one of his rare visits to England while the rehearsals of 'The Beggar's Opera' were proceeding, and who, I believe, so long as he stayed here, came to every single performance—and to anyone who knows Gordon Craig's general attitude towards the theatre, that is no small compliment.)

Just as I cannot (and, fortunately, I think it is unnecessary) describe the scenery in detail, so I cannot appraise the design and colours used in the costumes. They were chosen deliberately by Lovat to represent a period a little earlier than that of the original production of the play, partly because he found that period more attractive from the designer's point of view, but also because the incidents and characters described belong to a time that Gay well remembered, but had already passed when he was writing it. It is also to be remembered that the finery worn by the ladies and gentlemen in the play was finery stolen and somewhat tattered, and that in those days dresses, and especially men's dresses, though they cost more, were worn and serviceable for a far longer period than those of modern times. These dresses were all carried out by the firm of which Mr. Charles Wilson is the head, though to them the making of anything but the latest creations was an entirely new experience. They had the advantage, however, of the active help of Mrs. Lovat Fraser, who has a particular genius for this kind of work, which she has since continued to turn to full account. Indeed, all the dresses in 'The Duenna' have been carried out by the firm of which she is now senior partner, and under her direction.

It seemed as the production grew nearer, rather to my surprise, that many people were good enough to

share in our excited anticipation of its results; and at any rate, for two or three days the papers were full of articles giving histories of the previous career of the play, and there were many prophecies of a triumph to come—so much so that I began to feel extremely uncomfortable in case a disappointment might be in store for them and for me!

For one thing, the task of interpreting the play was really an extremely difficult one. It bore no relation to anything that had been attempted before, at any rate in our time. Both the jokes and the words of the songs were extremely difficult to 'get over', as the phrase is.

Then again, most of the singers were accustomed to the methods and conventions of acting used in opera and musical comedy; and all these had to be unlearnt. Opera singers, as a rule, are very good at singing when they speak, but very bad at speaking when they sing, if you understand what I mean. And, as I have said before, they have a hundred good reasons for explaining why, when they sing, the words cannot (sometimes they go so far as saying ought not to) be heard. Of this entirely false belief which Mr. Plunket Greene has done much to expose, I was determined to disabuse them; though my very slight knowledge of the art of singing provided me only with a very blunt knife to cut through the wire entanglements of their defence. Then again, I find many singers have an inborn prejudice against performing a cadenza lying down or kneeling, or with their back to the audience, or in whatever position I felt it was necessary to place them. But this particular company was very kind and very patient, and took my word with a touching trust when I as-

sured them that all things were possible with faith. All the same, I went through many moments of despair, a despair which reached its nadir on the occasion of the last dress rehearsal. I believe then that I really came to the conclusion that the whole production was merely an affected piece of dullness.

The night of the first performance arrived: and on our past reputation we were able to welcome a really brilliant audience. Almost at the last moment we had given up, very wisely, our first idea of having no conductor for our small orchestra; and Eugene Goossens very kindly consented to take the chair for awhile. I must confess now that during the greater part of the first act I thought that my gloomiest fears might be realized. The audience seemed indeed to think it 'a quaint pretty thing', but it went along entirely without any of that excitement which spells success, and it was not till Ranalow and Miss Nelis sang their two duets that there was any real response: so that (if I may say so without boasting) it seemed as if it were the *introducers* of Gay who made the success, such as it was—I mean Lovat Fraser, Austin, and my humble self—not Mr. Gay. And I dare say this because, after the first few weeks and for the rest of the run, the situation—no doubt owing to the actors having improved out of all knowledge their method of delivery—completely changed. With the large popular audiences which then began to throng the Lyric, even though they appreciated (as I'm sure they did) the scenery and dresses, the music, and the methods of production, it was the actual play of Gay himself, and the words of the dialogue and the songs which won their particular affection.

I have never heard this theory advanced in so many words by anybody. I can only say that 'I saw it in the faces of them' . . . perhaps the members of 'The Beggar's Opera' Club could tell me whether I am right or wrong. 'The Beggar's Opera' Club was a mysterious institution composed, I think, entirely of frequenters of the gallery. Whether they had any other meeting-place besides that luxurious part of our theatre I cannot say; nor can I recollect any of their rules, though I believe the principal one was that no one was eligible for membership unless he or she had sat through the play thirty times. I confess with shame that I am ineligible myself—unless eclectically!

Though the criticisms in the newspapers were almost universally appreciative to the point of enthusiasm, so much so that a violent condemnation in an undergraduate paper at Cambridge came almost as a welcome relief, the affair was by no means the immediate success that, for instance, 'The Way of the World' was. Of course, it is possible that the time of year had a good deal to do with this; but a good many people found that only on a second visit could they thoroughly appreciate its particular flavour. But by the middle of the autumn we had arrived at that happy state when an empty seat in any part of the house was a rarity. And I personally, ingrate that I am, was beginning to fear that Mr. Gay and his infernal opera was to be the sole topic of conversation which I should ever be called upon to enjoy; and if there is a thing which I really hate talking about when I go out, it is the theatre and anything to do with it. I spend on an average twelve hours a day within its walls, and when I do escape I

like to talk about things of which my knowledge is scanty, like Baroque Architecture, and Einstein, and Prisoner's Base.

The effect of this particular revival of 'The Beggar's Opera' on society generally was certainly as great, even taking into account the increase in population, as it was in the original production. If the music was no more printed upon fans, it was played upon every pier. Largely owing to its influence, I think, ladies' fringes almost entirely disappeared, and panniers appeared beneath their evening skirts. I don't know that there was actually any increase in the number of convictions for highway robbery; but then, that picturesque amusement is unfortunately already almost extinct beyond resurrection. Very shortly no less than three touring companies were playing our version in the provinces, and there were others playing, as, of course, they had every right to do, versions of their own. Somehow none of these achieved any very satisfactory result, partly because the production was designed for a theatre of a particular size, and still more because the casting of the play is an almost insurmountably difficult business; as is the playing of Mr. Austin's score by an unaccustomed orchestra.

No company was sent out to risk yellow fever, if yellow fever still survives, in the West Indies; but at the invitation of a great enthusiast, Mr. Duff, I myself took out a company, to which Miss Nelis, Mr. Heather, and Mr. Wynn were temporarily lent, to produce the play in New York. There, alas! it was not a success.

I remember when I stepped ashore into that vast shed which is the common entrance to America,

Stephen Thomas (who has been, since the beginning of things, and still is at the leisure moments which he can spare from his new position as a government official, my right-hand man and stage manager, and combines enthusiasm and extreme pessimism in an extraordinary degree) received me with these affecting words: 'I say, I don't think this is our place.' It certainly wasn't. I had received many tips from my friends who had visited America before me as to how I was to deal with the cohort of reporters who would meet me pencil in hand, all agog to learn my apologia for the theatre of which I was the proud and titular head. They were unnecessary. I had the unique experience of setting foot in America and returning to my own country without seeing as much as one of them.

Exactly what was the cause of the total failure of 'The Beggar's Opera' in New York to attract the attention which many people would say it was good enough to deserve, I cannot say. For one thing, Mr. Duff and his associates perhaps strove too meticulously to make an exact repetition of its circumstances in this country. It was, so they said, to make in New York an exactly similar appearance and success. It was to be produced unheralded at a theatre comparable in size and distance from Broadway to the size of the Lyric, Hammersmith, and its distance from Piccadilly. The *élite* of New York society was to travel for their pleasure. They did not. The first night, though the performance was excellent, made no impression whatever on its audience; and, in spite of the very kind notices in the papers and a few devoted adherents, that lack of impression remained. I sat in front in a half-empty house simply bewildered by the fact that the jokes and songs which evoked

such thunders of applause at Hammersmith passed in New York practically unnoticed. Poor Lovat had been rated by me soundly for his extravagance in subscribing to an American Press Cutting Association for the event; but I don't think a single paper mentioned his name in connection with the scenery—though they have learnt to appreciate his art since. A few days afterwards I returned to England with my head bloody but I hope unbowed, feeling a very lesser Columbus. It may be that some other production of mine will please them better. I hope so indeed, for I cherish an intense admiration for that theatre-proud nation. I should add that Mr. Duff himself remained completely undaunted—that he continued to tour 'The Beggar's Opera' all over America for nearly three years, and I believe in some towns other than New York it did meet with a greater appreciation. All the same, I believe it to be true that 'The Beggar's Opera' will never be greeted as it should be except in the town of its origin.

Its fate in Australia was very similar to that in America, though the representative of the Australian firm which undertook its production prophesied confidently to the contrary. And yet it is curious but true that both American and Australian visitors, when they saw it over here, seemed to appreciate its merits to the full. In any case, however much I may endeavour to explain its failure, I make and feel no complaint. I only feel sorry for the disappointment of so many people who felt it might be otherwise.

In the course of its run in London the cast naturally and inevitably underwent many changes, though one Gentleman of the Road actually had the distinction of

never missing a single performance. Mr. Ranalow, Miss French, and Miss Marquesita played throughout the run with occasional holidays, and all three acted with as much spirit on the last night as they did on the first. The place of Mr. Austin, who after Mr. Goossens' departure succeeded to the conductorship of the orchestra, was taken by Mr. Wynn, and then, with tremendous popularity, by Mr. Scott Russell. There were many 'Pollies', all charming; and principally Miss Katherine Arkandy, and Miss Kathlyn Hilliard. If before the production I had been asked whether the standard of acting could have been kept up for so long a period as three years I should have deemed it utterly impossible; but with every desire to be severely critical, I believe it was the case.

And during the run of 'The Beggar's Opera' Lovat Fraser died—he had been an ill man ever since the war, and I could never see the play again without thinking bitterly of his loss. So much has been written of him, so secure is his niche in the Temple of Fame, that I need write no more.

I will tell just one little anecdote, typical of him, but it has not been told before.

In 1914, when war was declared, Lovat was a young painter, and with all the delicate temperament of the artist very highly developed. His constitution was frail, he could not bear the sound of firearms, and he had a peculiar loathing of 'drilling', acquired at school.

But he was determined to go. He shut himself up for some weeks and practised for hours at a time, marking time, shouldering arms and presenting, all the things he thought he never could learn like other boys. Then he enlisted.

CHAPTER X

CONGREVE AND SHERIDAN

THE RUN of 'The Beggar's Opera' came to an end on the 17th December 1923, and if I remember rightly that day was a Monday. And I think I should always choose a Monday for the last night of any really popular play, not for merely sordid reasons, but because I think any chance should be seized to turn that gloomiest of evenings into a festivity. And a festivity that Monday evening certainly was. There were moments when I thought it never would come to an end, and that the audience would never stop applauding. The principals, of course, were received with salvos of applause, and floral tributes of every kind, but I do not believe, though 'The Beggar's Opera' did not actually achieve a record run, for it was beaten easily by 'Chu Chin Chow', and I think also 'Charley's Aunt' and 'Our Boys', there can ever have been an occasion when an audience demanded to see with their own eyes the Stage Manager, the Business Manager, and even the Electrician and a little row of Understudies. Yet all this did actually happen upon that night. Only the Property Men and the Dressers preserved a dignified if cheerful anonymity, peeping from the Wings. Yet for me it could not altogether be a happy evening for Lovat Fraser was dead—had died, in fact, in the middle of the run of the play. Here again I am at a loss to know how much I may speak of him, for his life has been written, and his pictures and designs, many of

which have been acquired for the nation, speak for him far better than I can. But I cannot acknowledge too often the share—the greater share I think—which he had in any little success the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith has made, and more than that his influence on the English Theatre as a whole. Personally, he was the most delightful companion and friend, and his whole nature was sweet and self-sacrificing, and at every step I take I remember him, and wish I could turn to him for encouragement and advice.

The immediate successor to 'The Beggar's Opera' was another Shakespeare play, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', though the production was not actually mine but Mr. Bridges Adams's, I supplying the cast and introducing Miss Edith Evans for the first time to a Hammersmith audience. It was one of those affairs in which one says every day 'The Business must go up. Look how the audience love it. Listen to their laughter. Hear their remarks as they come out. Never have they enjoyed anything so much'. And yet the thing fails. I find these things very difficult to explain—the philosophy of the theatre demands a greater concentration of study than I have been able to give it.

And talking of the philosophy of the theatre, it occurs to me that the latter half of this book has entirely neglected to discuss my private life, or at any rate anything of public interest that may be abstracted from my conduct of it. And I am afraid it is true that the running of a theatre, even a small one, demands so much concentration that it has allowed nothing or nearly nothing outside of it to dwell in my memory. I gratefully allow that its profits, though at periods they have been negligible and

Photo. Bertram Park

SCENE FROM 'THE DUENNA'

will be so again, have enabled me to bring up three sons and send two of them to Harrow, and one of these to Oxford, with a third, some good fortune accruing, to follow. And during 'The Beggar's Opera' boom, though my own share in the swag, for I think the nature of the play justifies my describing it as such, was a very small one, I rashly proceeded to build a London house, an investment which, as it turned out, was not an unwise one, and certainly very interesting, though except for a few months I have never been well enough off to live in it.

It came about this way.

My lease of a house in Pelham Crescent, very charming but too small for my growing family, was coming to an end, and I spent as much leisure as I could find prowling about to discover the ideal home. I wanted to live in Hammersmith and facing the river, but nothing at the moment was to be found there. But I wandered several times down or up a little lane opposite the Brompton Oratory, within its own private gates, at the end of which were two little cottages with a large garden, a piece of almost real country, an oasis in the roar of what is almost the heart of London. Nobody seemed to know whom they belonged to, and at any rate house agents are always entirely useless when you ask them questions like that. But one day, almost by a miracle, I overheard a very old gentleman in Harrods saying that he wished to sell his lease of Thurloe Lodge, which the joint cottages were called. He had only a little over a year to sell, and, with dilapidations impending, Harrods told him in my hearing that it was hardly likely he would succeed. Luckily, however, I knew something of the custom of granting new

leases to sitting tenants, and I decided to take the risk and offered him a hundred pounds upon the spot. He accepted it at once, very wisely from his point of view, and though I took a risk, it came off. I traced the landlords, passed successfully through the terrible day when an intervening tenant is liable to appear, and acquired a long lease for a reasonable sum. Then I proceeded with the help of my friend D'Arcy Braddell, the architect, to pull the cottages down and build what I think is really an ideal small home, with a double garage, central heating and every possible modern gadget. We enjoyed a hectic three months of being admired and visited by all our friends, when at long length it was finished. But, alas, I had spent twice as much upon it as I had intended, and rather more than I possessed. At the same time it is a house which everybody covets, and I have let it well. Fortunately my present house, River House, Hammersmith, fell vacant just then, and I moved there, and luckily I like that even better. For of all the lovely things in London, the river is the loveliest, especially late at night, and no man can count himself unblessed who can nightly contemplate it. And River House is within five minutes' walk of the Lyric, and within a quarter of an hour of two open air swimming baths, which are my special, and, I hope, harmless hobby. I used to swim in the river, too, even in the winter, but lately a certain oiliness has put a stop to that diversion for me. We achieve great popularity once a year, which is as much as is good for us, when the Oxford and Cambridge crews flash past. I am too patriotic to put them in the other order, as I am afraid I should do. Almost the last outing of dear Ellen Terry was to our

house on a boat-race day. She was then supposed to be just a little vague as to the more serious problems of life. But as the crews arrived she was quite emphatic. She turned to me and, with a winning smile, she whispered, 'I don't care a d—— which wins'. And there is a philosophy and a criticism of life in that attitude.

I should like it to be said of me, as could certainly be said of a far greater predecessor and man than I can pretend to be, Samuel Phelps, that I have shown on a very miniature scale what a National Theatre could prove on a great one, that the great plays of other periods than our own hold their interest for a contemporary audience, and that it is the plain duty of all who believe in children and education to see that they are constantly performed. That at least is what I believe, and I wish Lamb had not destroyed that belief in others. It is for this reason, in circumstances of some difficulty, that I have revived already 'The Way of the World', 'The Critic', 'The Rivals', and 'She Stoops to Conquer', and that, before my career is finished, I hope to cause to be played 'The School for Scandal' and 'The Importance of being Earnest', not that these by any means exhaust the list of plays coming within this category.

'The Way of the World' is the greatest of all comedies of manners—a kind of comedy which Congreve himself defined in his dedication to the Earl of Montague in saying that his idea was 'to design characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly as through an affected wit: a wit which, at the same time that it is affected, is also false'. At the same time, it was a sort of reply to Jeremy Collier's attack on 'the immorality and

profaneness of the English stage'. Its first unlucky production was at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, where 'The Beggar's Opera' afterwards appeared, in 1700. The best possible cast was secured for it, including Betterton, Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Bracegirdle (the secretly adored of Congreve).

You will readily see that in attempting to produce it again I had far greater need of faith than in the case of 'The Beggar's Opera', for whereas 'The Beggar's Opera' had never failed to make the fortunes of all who handled it, 'The Way of the World' in spite of the eulogies of the critics, had never failed to lead to bankruptcy. This I put down largely to its extremely complicated action—'a jungle of passionless intrigues'—which an ordinary audience finds hard to follow; and what an ordinary audience finds hard to follow it rejects altogether. I therefore burlesqued the plot considerably, and treated it as a joke. As 'A. B. W.' said in 'The Times', it was 'a rattling, jaunty, jigging, almost jazzing revival. The play is fantasticated'. That seemed to me the only thing to do; and I think I was justified in the result.

But no, that is hardly fair. I think, in discussing the character of 'Polly', I have mentioned how the character of 'Millamant' ran away with its author; and that, indeed, is the case. What started as a comedy of manners is suddenly rapt from our sight in one of the most blinding visions of character that have ever been dramatized. And it was that which gave Miss Evans her real chance. The 'Millamant' of that last final surrender to 'Mirabell' is something far more than the 'Millamant' who comes 'full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders': it is a woman wittier, more

fascinating, and more tender, probably, than has ever been seen off the stage or elsewhere on it. Here is no 'character rendered ridiculous by its affected wit': here is a character rendered sublime by the poignancy and the sincerity of its wit. And I repeat that there has never been on or off the stage a woman so sublime in the same way as 'Millamant': no one reading the play can fail to see this, and it is a most extraordinary tribute to Edith Evans that she was able to take on her shoulders the weight of such an enormous conception, and play it almost as if the conception were purely her own rather than the author's.

Nobody could find fault with Miss Evans—indeed, nobody tried; though the rest of the cast were not altogether so kindly treated. Miss Margaret Yarde's 'Lady Wishfort' was a frequent bone of contention; and though one critic gave her the palm for the piece, several others considered that she made it too farcical. But why, in heaven's name, shouldn't she? She made it an outstanding piece of acting, and a piece of acting which fitted in perfectly well with the rest of the production. Even if it was not, perhaps, entirely Congreve's 'Lady Wishfort', it was a performance which justified itself simply and solely by its own excellence. Miss Yarde is in an unique position among contemporary actresses: she lights up any play in which she appears for a few moments, and yet there is hardly any play in which a part for her of any magnitude can be found! And except for 'Lady Wishfort', she has hardly ever had a chance of giving scope to her peculiar and inimitable gifts.

It would be ungracious indeed of me were I to pass over Mr. Robert Loraine's performance of 'Mirabell', even though I have paid tribute to it else-

where. It needed a fine actor indeed to play the lover to Miss Evans' 'Millamant'. And there was also in the cast Norman V. Norman, Scott Russell, Harold Anstruther, and Harold Scott, all of whose performances were excellent.

I must not forget also to mention the dancing of Miss Elsa Lanchester, condemned, though rather ingenuously condemned, by some critic on the ground that it was a mere 'studio turn'. She had, it is true, done something very like it before, but it was always an eighteenth-century study, inspired by Hogarth's picture of 'The Shrimp Girl', strictly an anachronism, it is true, but a very little one, and one that I admitted and suggested for a very sufficient reason. At the actual period of the play, solo dancing was unknown in this country, though examples of it were to be found in Paris. 'Lady Wishfort' would probably have engaged a troupe, but troupes of dancers, though well within the means of a hostess in the reign of Queen Anne, were beyond the means of a producer of the classics in the reign of King George V.

In my case I have the excuse that the audience thoroughly enjoyed it.

Mr. Frederic Austin was again responsible for the music, which was played by a quartette of harpsichord, 'cello, violin, and flute, dressed in the style of the play, and very agreeably they appealed both to eye and ear.

The song—one of the loveliest lyrics ever written—and one of the wittiest, was exquisitely sung by Miss Kathlyn Hilliard, one of our many 'Pollies'. But, alas! its meaning, however cleverly sung, could not penetrate to the ears of the audience unless previously familiar with its argument.

Our first night was 7th February 1924, and it lasted till the 28th June, a very satisfactory run and a financial success. And that its popularity was not exhausted is proved by the fact that it was revived a year or two later by Mr. Lion at Wyndham's Theatre and repeated its success. The production was, of course, mine, and the cast much the same, except that I was otherwise engaged, and that Tearle took the place of Loraine. I am quite certain that I could revive it at least once every two years, provided that Miss Edith Evans was available. But that, unfortunately, is a difficult proviso to make. And thereby hangs a tale with a moral. A certain provincial manager, a very shrewd man of business, visited the Lyric during its run on a Saturday night. I don't think he knew very much what it was all about, but he heard the applause and made himself acquainted with the receipts. He at once bought our whole production and booked a tour for it. But he did not engage the company, but one of his own choosing, and consisting of sound actors but unaccustomed to this particular kind of work. The result, I fear, was in every way disastrous, and he has returned to Musical Comedy, his earlier fancy. And this is by no means the only time that a similar thing has happened.

'The Way of the World' was followed by a little operetta called 'Midsummer Madness', written by Clifford Bax, with music by Armstrong Gibbs, and containing only four characters, two of whom were performed by Miss Marie Tempest, lately returned to England after a world tour, and Frederick Ranalow. It was a charming, witty, graceful thing, and lovely to look at, with its decorations by George Sheringham, who has now re-designed, and it was

time, most of the scenery and dress for the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera.

I saw and see its faults. I know that it was not perfectly acted and sung, but its almost complete failure (though like all my failures, it has its adherents) was not only a surprise but a bitter disappointment to me, and I prefer not to dwell upon it. I should like to do it again, and do it better and see what happened then, but that is a luxurious and risky proceeding which I fear will be denied me. But at least the Lyric will always feel honoured at having had Miss Marie Tempest for a short time as its leading lady, and I know that its failure never for a moment made her lose her affection for the theatre, or her faith in the artistic merits of the play, and that is always something. And through a habit of mine for which I have greatly suffered, I left it on much too long in the face of a continual loss. I recovered everything, and a little more with my next venture.

It has been a favourite dictum of theatrical historians, and its success at the time of its first performance is in favour of their judgment, that 'The Duenna' is the best comic opera in the English language, 'The Beggar's Opera' excepted. I do not think at any time I have agreed with their opinion even as regards the eighteenth century, and I certainly do not think that it is a better opera than 'The Mikado' or 'The Yeomen of the Guard'.

At the same time, it was obviously marked for revival, and seemed likely to have a considerable success with our audience, and this view turned out to be conspicuously right.

Naturally, when I was producing it I read a good deal of literature on the subject of Sheridan. Amongst

other books was Mr. Walter Sichel's admirable 'Life'. I struck in it a most excellent example of what I have had to say in my chapter on 'The Beggar's Opera' against literary critics. They read plays and judge them solely as books: they have not the necessary visual and auditory imagination to see and hear a play in an imaginary theatre when reading it, and fall into the most extraordinary errors of judgment as the result. 'It is difficult now to realize the stir that it ["The Duenna"] made', says Mr. Sichel, 'a sensation not merely of the moment, but retained in full vigour for fifty years. . . . Strokes like these give salt to a piece which in the main has lost its savour. Apart from its lyrics, indeed, "The Duenna" is dead as Queen Charlotte. It remains in the long list of obsolete innovations, and resembles some Early Victorian cabinet, well inlaid and once admired, but now hopelessly out-of-date.' Perhaps this curious lack of judgment in theatrical matters on the part of literary critics springs from an excess, rather than a lack, of respect for the managers; perhaps Mr. Sichel thought that because 'The Duenna' had not been recently revived it could not be, and modestly refrained from using his own judgment in the matter. But I suspect, with all deference (for in matters of history and pure literature Mr. Sichel is quite outside the reach of any criticism of mine)—I suspect that his judgment sprang from a misconception of the nature of the theatre. This suspicion is backed up by a concrete example. Mr. Sichel quotes as one of the most famous and wittiest lines—as indeed he justly might—the description of the six-weeks' Christian 'who stands like a dead wall between the church and synagogue, or like the blank leaves be-

tween the Old and New Testament'. To anybody reading the play purely as a book this line is bound to stand out; but I can record it as a fact that it has never raised even the ghost of a laugh in our production! There is a certain slowness of apprehension which is inseparable from a theatre audience: not that they are stupid people—far from it; but it is one thing to have all one's wits concentrated to a single point when reading a book in one's study, and another thing to be able to follow out with equal agility of abstract thought when perpetual diversions are attacking the brain through the eye and ear. Reading a play in the study, the dialogue is the whole thing, and can claim the whole attention; when produced on the stage it is but a third of the whole, where action (in which I include decoration) and music claim equal shares with it. And this line is a typical example of one just a shade too subtle to get over the footlights. Nor is this obtuseness peculiar to our age, for that Sheridan himself was doubtful of its effect on the stage is conclusively proved by the fact that in the manuscript it was first deleted and only re-inserted later. Sheridan would hardly have done that if he regarded it, from the stage point of view, as one of the best lines in the piece.

But whatever the reason may be, since the eighteenth century the play has hardly been revived at all. Some admirable performances of it were given at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich a year or two before; and the Birmingham Repertory Company have done it at Birmingham. But otherwise it was absolutely untouched. In the eighteenth century, as I have said, its success was phenomenal: its run beat even that of 'The Beggar's Opera'. It was produced

in the autumn of 1775 at Covent Garden—not, as has been stated in the press, at Drury Lane. Indeed, Drury Lane was hard put to it to find a counter-attraction, and ended by setting up as a rival a play by Sheridan's own mother, 'The Discovery', Mr. Aldous Huxley's version of which I recently produced for the Three Hundred Club. But nothing could draw the public from 'The Duenna'. It had an excellent cast with Leoni, Quick as 'Isaac', and Mrs. Green for the 'Duenna'; it had all the advantages which 'The Rivals' in its first edition had not had, and it succeeded beyond all possible expectation. Curiously enough, Sheridan never authorized the publication of the text; indeed, he only fully authorized the publication of 'The Critic', 'Pizarro', and a political pamphlet. But garbled versions and travesties abounded, the first being printed in Dublin in 1785; and editions of parodies, according to Mr. Sichel, seem even to have found their way into bibliographies of the play itself.

After that, as I have said, the nineteenth century quietly forgot it, adopting the comfortable doctrine that being the product of an earlier generation, it must, *ipso facto*, now be dead.

Mr. Sichel is quite right, however, when he gives as one of the causes of the piece's original success that the music fits it like a glove. It certainly does, or did. But it is not anything like so outstanding a piece of work as the libretto. We soon found, when we came to examine it, that it had aged a great deal more than the book. Linley's work in general has been described as 'Handel and water'; and while it goes without saying that Linley was a very talented person, there is a certain amount of truth in the

accusation. It is very delightful in its absolute purity of harmony, which was then fashionable; but it has not got what the dialogue has—staying power. There was no tune in it which could find its way into the repertory of the kitchen-maid and errand-boy, in the way that the old folk-tunes of 'The Beggar's Opera' did; no kitchen-maid was likely to teach me airs from 'The Duenna'! After a month or two, indeed, of our run, we all of us soon found the very inoffensiveness of the music growing gradually tiresome, and longed for something violently arresting and vulgar. In consequence, when we were planning our production, it was obvious that the music would need a very great deal of overhauling, and indeed re-writing; and for the purpose we called in Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds was already a very distinguished pianist, and he conducted for us in 'The Insect Play'. He is such a modest man that it was with a great deal of difficulty that I persuaded him of his competence for the task: when he sat down to it, however, he became enthusiastic, and by the time he had finished there was really a good deal more Reynolds than Linley in the composition. About half the airs were his alone, and all the others he had considerably revised. Consequently, it was with considerable ill-temper that I found a criticism in one of the papers which sneered at Mr. Reynolds, and at 'this matter of composing music after somebody else who had composed it'. This critic gave it to be understood that Reynolds simply altered a note here and there, and always for the worse, and then was trying to take the credit for the whole. The critic, who thereby tried to give the impression that he was familiar with Linley's music, simply gave himself

away and betrayed his entire ignorance of the original setting, as well as his own ill-nature. But I am glad to say that he afterwards made a thoroughly well-deserved apology to Mr. Reynolds; for a modester man, one less given to self-advertisement and taking the credit for other men's work, it would be hard to find.

The scenery and dresses, of course, were designed by Mr. Sheringham; and I think they are the most successful bit of work for the stage he has yet done. Mechanically they are extraordinarily simple; and yet he contrives to give, by the manipulation of a few drops, a quite astonishing air of variety. Of furniture, except for a couple of chairs, we had none whatever; and consequently, the scene could be completely changed in between four and five seconds. Except between the acts, we never lowered the curtain at all, only turned out the lights; and in the short period when the sudden darkness blinds the eyes, before the pupils have time to pick up the rays of those exit lights (which to the despair of the producer, the Lord Chamberlain insists shall always be kept fully burning), the drops went up and down, libraries became monastery gardens, streets became churches, or what not. Mr. Sheringham seldom exhibited better an admirable sense of colour, and a very great deal of credit is, I feel, due to him.

But everybody worked with an admirable enthusiasm. Mr. Rupert Doone's Spanish dancers, who were one and all English, were specially indefatigable. For weeks before the production they rehearsed their dances day and night almost; one could hardly find a corner of the theatre where a *fandango* was not in progress; and the result completely justified the

pains they had taken. Some critics complained that their dancing occupied too much of the audience's attention; but there I cannot agree. I feel myself that it was perfectly in keeping with the picture, and was so good in itself as to be a continual delight.

The part of 'Don Carlos' gave me a considerable amount of trouble during the rehearsals.

In the original MS. he was intended to be a comic Jewish friend of 'Isaac'—a sort of musical version of Tubal.

But the part was given to Leoni, a favourite tenor singer and a counterpart of the 'Matinée idol' of to-day—or ought I to say of yesterday? (The simile holds good though, of course, in those days there were no matinées.)

Leoni, however, was himself a Jew, so strict a Jew that on his account performances of the play were never given on Fridays. But to play a Jew, and a comic Jew at that, was not within his conception of his dignity. Sheridan must have said, 'Oh, have it your own way', as many authors have had to say to stage favourites before and since. So the comic Jew became a gracious but entirely characterless 'Don Carlos', the ancestor of a host of dramatis personae known in theatrical parlance as 'Charles, his friend'.

No reason appears in the text for 'Isaac' having such a friend, ready to sing sentimental ballads on the smallest provocation, and as I was not going to waste the humours of Guy le Feuvre I had to invent one. I conceived the notion, therefore, that 'Carlos' was a needy aristocrat, a kind of dependent 'Sir Eglamour', hired perhaps to introduce 'Isaac' into the manners and customs of the aristocracy and fulfilling his bargain with despondency. I hope Sheridan forgives me

for helping him out of a difficulty, which I am sure he created against his better judgment. If he saw Le Feuvre's performance I am sure he has.

He became, I think, first favourite with the audience, and created a 'tradition' for the part which will remain.

Miss Elsie French as the 'Duenna' had again a part which suited her admirably, and a truly terrific creature she made. Her dance with 'Isaac' at the end of the courting scene in the library never failed to be encored again and again, as it fully deserved to be, for an extremely witty piece of miming it was.

There was only one alteration which I made in the actual text, beyond the addition of two songs, one of which was by Sheridan, and one from a contemporary opera. This alteration was in deference to public taste—I deleted a scene which was rather an offensve attack on Roman Catholicism and the monastic system; not particularly amusing in itself, but simply put in because such attacks at the time were fashionable. Nowadays they are not, and rightly not. But even with this scene omitted I had certain trouble on that score. As we first produced it, the magnificent grotesque scene between 'Isaac', 'Antonio', and the 'Bacchanalian monk', which culminates in the rousing song, 'This Bottle's the Sun our Table' (sung with such gorgeous hilarity by Mr. Scott Russell), was followed immediately by the church interior, with the wedding conducted by Mr. Scott Russell; and the juxtaposition came to many of the audience with something of a shock. Accordingly I slightly altered the dialogue, so as to make the 'Bacchanalian monk' not the officiating priest, but simply a lay brother, and put back a small bit of dialogue between the

song and the church scene to let the audience down a bit gently, as it were. And after that I had no more complaints.

For our two heroines, 'Donna Louisa' and 'Donna Clara', we had Elsa Macfarlane (afterwards succeeded by Marjorie Dixon) and Isobel Maclaren. Miss Macfarlane had hitherto appeared only in the most modern of musical comedies. Elsa Lanchester and Angela Baddeley made a charming pair of pages, though the parts of 'Lewis' and 'Sancho' really did not give scope for the abilities of either of them. In the play, too, Pitt-Chatham's daughter, Joan, made her debut as 'Donna Clara's' 'maid'.

Mr. Reynolds himself conducted the orchestra, which consisted of a couple of violins, a viola, a 'cello, double-bass, two flutes, and a bassoon, and which included that admirable 'cellist, Miss Phyllis Hasluck, and was led by Mr. Philip Levine.

The run of 'The Duenna' was certainly not long, not nearly as long as its reception justified me in thinking it might be, but it gave pleasure to a great many people and made money. I decided to follow it with 'The Rivals', which had been too long absent from the London stage. It is a play comparatively easy to do, and helped me to make quickly a step forward in an ambition which I cherish, to give this generation an opportunity of seeing all the leading classics of the eighteenth century upon the stage within the space of their theatre-going days.

The history of 'The Rivals' is a very curious one: it immediately preceded 'The Duenna', and Sheridan was already a marked man when it appeared. The scandal-mongers in the newspapers had profited to such an extent by the complicated affair of his Pla-

Photo. Bertram Park

tonic elopement with Miss Linley, his two bloody duels with Matthews, and his subsequent marriage against his father's consent, and with the somewhat tardy consent of his father-in-law, that his name was already a familiar one to readers of the news sheets. And when he had settled down in London with his lovely and accomplished wife, he had earned general approbation by his absolute refusal to let her sing for money (and it must be remembered that at eighteen she was one of the most famous singers of her time)—a refusal which modern notions of feminism would consider at least a doubtful virtue, but which then seemed a necessity for a man of honour. Instead, however, he had taxed his already circumscribed resources by giving frequent invitation concerts, which drew everyone who was lucky enough to be admitted. As for writing, he had done nothing before 'The Rivals' of any great merit; and the first edition of 'The Rivals', though an enormous advance on anything he had yet done, was a great deal too long-winded. It was produced anonymously, but everyone knew its authorship: consequently a brilliant audience was present, but it was by no means altogether friendly. A *claque* of hissers had to be thrown out of the gallery, and even the boxes witnessed a challenge to a duel! Outside the critics raged and foamed: they said of 'The Rivals' what is quite invariably said of any dramatic innovation—that it was not a play at all. In short, it was a failure. Mrs. Sheridan, who was (I suspect) anxious for an excuse to begin singing again, hardly concealed her delight. 'My dear Dick', she wrote, 'I am delighted. I always knew that it was impossible you could make anything by writing plays, so now there is nothing for it

but my beginning to sing publicly again, and we shall have as much money as we like.' But Sheridan was obdurate. He re-wrote 'The Rivals', cutting it and improving it almost out of recognition. It was produced again on 28th January, and ran for a fortnight, which then meant a very signal success.

To describe its subsequent stage history would be a task that would require a volume in itself.

Next to the 'School for Scandal' and 'She Stoops to Conquer', it has been the most persistently revived of all the plays since Shakespeare, and indeed it is a commonplace of the text-books to describe these three plays as the only successful contributions to the literature of the theatre since his day. It is a shallow judgment which I hope our efforts at Hammersmith have done just a little to upset—I don't think at any rate that future writers will be ready to place 'The Way of the World' below 'The Rivals'. If they do our audience will certainly not be found in agreement with them.

I attempted to make no 'daring innovations' in the methods of my production. I did tamper with the traditional presentation of 'Mrs. Malaprop', however, and though I had some supporters, on the whole frankly the verdict, perhaps rightly, was against me. It arose this way. The last time 'The Rivals' was produced in London I refrained from paying it a visit, and the excuse I made to myself was that the character of 'Mrs. Malaprop' bored me.

She is amusing for five minutes, but after that we know exactly what she is going to do and how she is going to do it. To be moved to laughter we must meet with the unexpected.

I thought many people would share my views, and

it occurred to me to make 'Mrs. Malaprop' a 'natural' character—a personage that might excite amusement but not bewilderment in the set in which she moved.

In carrying out the experiment I required Miss Edith Evans to help me, but the idea did not appeal to her.

Miss Green loyally essayed the task . . . and after the first few performances, I think, with complete success. She was not, however, successful on the fatal first night, and did not please the critics. Her natural sweetness and dignity and her almost insuperable gracefulness were too much for her.

'The Rivals' was by no means a failure, but it cannot be fairly ranked among our successes, though I think throughout it was better acted than any play we have done, and Norman Wilkinson's scenery and dresses were exquisite. But perhaps it proved its weakness as a play—it is certainly a comedy of promise rather than achievement—the work of an extremely gifted amateur.

It is fair to say that Oxford did not think so. I took it there for a week at the end of the run, and broke all records at the theatre there, in spite of the counter-attractions of the river in Eights Week.

CHAPTER XI

FURTHER ADVENTURES

TWENTY years ago I played in a performance of 'The Cherry Orchard'. I remember little of it except that I wore a long and uncomfortable beard, that we had very few rehearsals, that none of the actors seemed to know much of what it was about, and that it was probably put on to meet the wishes of G. B. S., who professed himself and certainly was a fervent admirer of the author. The audience were so terribly bored that quite half of them left the theatre long before it was over.

The production of the same play by Mr. Fagan in 1925 had a very different history. I saw it at his little theatre at Oxford, and though by this time I knew, by reading, Tchekhov's plays pretty well, I did not realize the remarkable effect that they could have upon an audience. I wanted the whole company to come to Hammersmith for a brief season. It necessarily had to be brief for other arrangements had been made. I can't remember why, but for some reason I had to be away, and I think abroad at the time it was produced. I received a report of a favourable first night, and of violently opposed criticisms in the Press, which is all to the good. But at first nobody would come to see it—the attendance was really lamentable. Then suddenly Lady Cunard wrote a letter to the editor of the 'Daily Express', which had damned it, urging its merits. She wrote it, I am sure, without any suggestion from my management or Mr. Fagan's, for some law of nature ordains that a

'plotted' letter of this kind will have no effect whatever. I could give instances of this, where the writer has as much or more social influence than Lady Cunard. But the evident sincerity of this letter had its immediate answer. The audience doubled and doubled again, and when the piece left us, it was a great and deserved success, and did much to ensure Tchekhov's reputation in this country. And taken as a whole it was a good performance, though I think it was true, judging from its interpretation by Russian players, which I saw, that the air of melancholy which appears in England to be inseparable from it, was a little obvious and accentuated.

A revival, the first of several of 'The Beggar's Opera', though speaking personally and selfishly, I hope I have now seen the last, followed. Afterwards the theatre for the first time was closed for a period of three weeks, and entirely redecorated. It needed it. I left the choice of decoration entirely in the hands of Mr. Norman Wilkinson, and very wisely he retained its old character, and it is now cleaner but as rococo as ever. Only we removed their hopes of immortality upon the ceiling from Sims and Pettitt and other authors of melodrama, and substituted Congreve and Lovat Fraser and Drinkwater. I am not prepared to defend this arbitrary proceeding with any great conviction, and I do not think that many people have noticed it.

On the 17th of December in that year we opened the ball with a translation of Pirandello, called in our version, 'And that's the truth if You think it is'.

I spent a week with my friend Dunning Gribble in a small Italian frontier town, trying to absorb the right atmosphere.

Dunning Gribble is a young author of great promise, but good fortune has not yet arrived at his doorstep. I myself, and not the first manager to do so, bought his play, 'The Masque of Venice', but I thought the Lyric, Hammersmith, too small for its production, and allowed my rights to lapse. Eventually it was produced at the Savoy with Marie Tempest in the leading part, and was completely damned. But I was present at the first night and, capable as all the actors were, I have never known in my experience a play so seriously miscast, and it really had no chance of survival. Marie Tempest herself played a middle-aged lady definitely intended to be a laughing-stock, and entirely without charm, and Marie Tempest can be neither, however strenuously she tries. The mere attempt is an imposition predoomed to failure. Poor Dunning Gribble! He waited patiently and without complaint for five years for his play to be announced, and then one of our leading papers spoke of 'a new comedy by Gunning Dribble'! Could anything be harder? But I am glad to say a second chance is now coming his way.

I have had the oddest experiences of first nights. Our audience is inclined if anything to be too enthusiastic, and a very poor guide to what will eventually happen. The only definite exception I can recall is my second play of this season, 'Lionel and Clarissa', which had, for Hammersmith, a very cool reception. So much so indeed that I went to bed in the utmost depression, after a supper party at which the guests could scarcely conceal their sympathy, and lay awake all night seeing how best I could face immediate, and as it always seems,

irreparable ruin. Yet on the next day I found to my surprise a long queue at the box office and it ran, and ran very profitably, for 173 performances.

On the other hand Pirandello, had he been present, would have faltered at his welcome, which would have taken the roof off had it not just been repaired. Six months later I met, on the sands of Antibes, D'Egville, the caricaturist, who had been abroad ever since, and he remarked to me with evident sincerity, 'I suppose that marvellous success of yours is still running'. And on every subsequent night the applause was only lessened in volume because there were fewer hands to clap. Fewer, alas, and nightly yet more few. It was with extreme difficulty that we weathered three and a half weeks, and that at the cost of a considerable sum of money, though the production was cheap and the running expenses low. And the same experience has befallen every manager who tried to make an English audience enjoy Italy's leading dramatic author. The people who don't come, and their name is Legion, assemble at street corners and shout in unison, 'We don't want Pirandello'. But Hammersmith should have known better, and the play was most certainly well acted, Claude Rains in fact being superb. Nor have I ever enjoyed a part so much myself, nor one that better suited me.

I am quite unable either to account for what happened in the way of chilliness at the first night of 'Lionel and Clarissa', and there was no sign of it again. You must just call me, I fear, a poor theatre psychologist. Our cast included three veterans of the stage, Lottie Venne, Hayden Coffin, and Herbert

Waring. Lottie Venne I adored as a very small boy, and my adoration never ceased. This was her last professional engagement, and I hope and believe it was a happy one. Moreover, she was extremely good. Her only failure was to learn a little old French poem which I had introduced to help and lengthen her part. She knew no word of that language, but she insisted on trying. Unfortunately the poem had three points, gently *risqué* points, one at the end of each verse, and on the first night she remembered all the other lines but forgot each of these!

Of my next entertainment, 'Riverside Nights', which was concocted by my friend and neighbour A. P. Herbert and myself, John Galsworthy was so generous as to write: 'There must be something about "Riverside Nights" which distinguishes it from other revues, because it's the only revue I've been able to sit through entirely without grief. . . . "Riverside Nights" happens to be really witty and to lack vulgarity.' I ask no higher compliment, though I should not guess that Mr. Galsworthy's sittings at revues had been very many, and therefore no other purveyor of these articles need feel hurt. My memories of Galsworthy are far more associated with the Eton and Harrow match, and there I think he would feel more at home than in the stalls of a light theatre. My own idea of the revue was frankly to furnish the sort of turns and items which I myself, being precious or highbrow or just vaguely discontented, as you choose to think, would rather see in any entertainment of the kind than what I generally do see. I also thought that the Russians should not have it all their own way, and that there is as much picturesque material for the purpose to be found in our

own history and folk-songs and dances as in theirs, and that our decorations are as good. Our audience very generally shared my opinions, though in some respects perhaps I went too far. The Critics at least condemned with unanimity the presentation of an Imaginary Conversation of Walter Savage Landor and an Illustration of a Poem by Wordsworth, which I did not intend to be taken quite as seriously as they, affronted, took it, and after a couple of performances I bowed to their opinion, and removed the two offending items. The first, indeed, was not well enough done to give it its full chance. Also I removed a Dramatic Pastoral by Bickerstaffe and Thomas Arne which did not find favour in their sight. But they were generous in their praise of the rest of the entertainment, and the receipts of the first few nights seemed to show that we were in for the greatest of all our Hammersmith successes, and that our treasury would be replenished as it very much needed. Alas, after a little more than a week the general strike was decreed and our poor little corner was the very centre of riot and confusion. It was simply impossible for anyone to get near the theatre, and we lived precariously for the next few days on 'booking' that had been created before the catastrophe. I took the bold step of moving it for a month to the Ambassadors Theatre, and though the thing did not really fit its new surroundings, we did curiously well there, and came back to more peaceable times with a profit. But 'Riverside Nights' never really recovered from the shock or the migration, and though I ran it for a few months, always expecting a happy convalescence, of that shock it eventually died. But I know that with many people it remains a very pleasant memory

and that is always something. Except as producer, my own contributions were a great deal less than Herbert's, and for that reason I have invited an obituary notice from him. No one who saw it is likely to forget his burlesque of Tchekhov, which was the most successful of all that made up the show, followed in popularity, I think, by the little play that was written at the age of ten by my second son Lyon. But the success of that was very largely due to the acting of Richard Goolden and Miles Malleson, and when I did the revue again at Oxford and Cambridge, I could find no successors to them at all, and had to omit it.

Here is A. P. H.'s letter:

'Dear Nigel,

'You ask me for a few words about "Riverside Nights", in which I had the honour to collaborate with you. It was a bold experiment for you and great fun for me: and we have reason to believe that it gave pleasure to many thousands of our fellow-citizens. Your idea, I believe, was to provide an entertainment which should have the flavour of Hammersmith, and the variety of a West End "revue", but without the kaleidoscopic snappiness and swiftness of the West End show. With the modest resources of the Lyric you could not hope to rival those breathless processions of songs and sketches and dances which are incomprehensibly known as "revues" in Piccadilly and the Strand. Few of the thousands of people who delight in these shows can realize what miracles of organization they are. I suppose that, from the stage-manager point of view, the production of a modern "slick" revue is the most exact-

ing and difficult of all theatrical feats. Grand opera must be a trifle by comparison. There must never be an instant's waiting: the audience (I don't quite know why) must not for a second be allowed to reflect on what they have just seen. The next mouthful is popped in before the last is properly swallowed. And therefore the "running order", the mere mechanical fitting together of the thing, with all the problems of scene-shifting, quick changes of costume, and the rest of it, is like a nightmare jig-saw puzzle. The chorus cannot be dressed again in time for *this*: and the scene for *that* cannot be set until *the other* is over; but then Miss Bright is in *this* and Mr. Gay is in *that*: but in that case Mr. Gay will have no wind left for the Peacock duet, and although Mr. Gay will graciously surmount that difficulty somehow, the fact remains that it is humanly impossible for Miss Bright to get into that beautiful Peacock (or Pea-hen) frock in time. Very well, then, Miss Bright must surrender her part to Miss Jolly: and then there are tears. . . .

'Many tears may fall, and much good material may have to be twisted, re-shaped or even scrapped simply to meet these purely mathematical fitting difficulties: indeed, I suspect that the value of snappiness and swiftness is sometimes over-estimated. But in the West End, after all, they have resources on the same scale as their problems. They have elaborate lighting: they have four or five sets of beautifully coloured "tabs", where you had to be content with two sets of black (not very new): they have (it seems) inexhaustible funds to expend upon costumes —you had to count every penny: they employ perhaps thirty chorus girls, and can have one large bevy on the stage and another changing in the dressing-

rooms (a great aid to the jig-saw puzzle)—you had, I think, nine ladies in all, *principals and chorus*! Moreover (now I am on this most important topic of the ladies) with two light operas in your programme, and those (rightly) exacting musicians, Mr. Alfred Reynolds and Mr. Frederic Austin, at your elbow, you had to find ladies who could sing as well as they looked, to say nothing of acting and dancing. I always love to hear you and these two fine musicians at the old controversy of "Ankles or Voices?" You are like myself for both, I know: and we secretly suspect that the musicians do not think as much about ankles as they should. But, between you, you generally arrive at a very pretty (and vocal) compromise or two, as you did in "Riverside Nights". But my real point is, that this problem (so strangely overlooked by the Creator) is ten times more difficult if you can afford only three young ladies, than it is to the happy producer who can run to thirty (and put the voices in the second row)!

'All this is not by way of apology for our show, but in applause for your boldness. You had the same problems as the West End, but in miniature: and the miniature, I imagine, is more difficult than the spacious canvas. You set out, I think, to do less, but to do it more thoroughly—fewer items, but more meaty. Four of the turns were operas or playlets lasting fifteen minutes or more. You paid your business man the compliment of supposing that he was not too tired to concentrate on the same scene for that length of time: and the charming music of Reynolds and Austin in "The Policeman's Serenade" and "Thomas and Sally", the delightful singing of Kathlyn Hilliard, Marie Dainton, and George Baker, and

the masterly buffoonery of Miles Malleson in Lyon's little play (to name only a few) justified, I think, your faith.

'The Tchekhov play—"Love Lies Bleeding"—was, perhaps, apart from the brilliant individual performances of Elsa Lanchester, Harold Scott, Penelope Spencer and Dorice Fordred—our most successful effort; and I think it is the best illustration of what you were aiming at, and what anyone who presents a similar entertainment should aim at. I dare to say that, although I wrote the actual words, for it was you who suggested that I should attempt a parody of Tchekhov, and I'm afraid it's not really a very difficult thing to do. The Tchekhov plays (which I love) were then being performed at Barnes, and any West End revue might have done the same thing. But in the West End they would have done it differently (all this is difficult to say without appearing to lecture the "West End", which is not my intention, for they know their business much better than I do): following the accepted plan of almost feverish brevity they would have compressed their parody of Tchekhov into two or at the most three minutes: and since a large part of the "effect" of that great writer is "cumulative", this would have been artistically wrong, though the sketch would no doubt have concluded with a good mirth-providing "tag". Again, they would probably have taken the easy and unenterprising course of parodying (verbally) some particular Tchekhov play. "The Three Sisters", for example, might have become "The Three Blisters". Or the thing would have been part of one of those six-minute trilogies, showing how (*a*) Barrie (*b*) Noel Coward and (*c*) Tchekhov would

dramatize "Little Red Riding Hood",—ingenious and clever but slightly unsatisfactory. Now we did at least attempt to parody not only the words, but the essential spirit of a Tchekhov play—wrote a new play of our own, and made the audience listen to it for a quarter of an hour or more (which is not too long, I think, to devote to a writer of Tchekhov's proportions, even in a revue). Once more, please acquit me of pomposity or superiority. The West End manager would reply that his audience does not know, or like, Tchekhov well enough to accept that sort of thing, and he is probably right. All I want to say is that it was very pleasant to work for an entertainment in which (with your inspiration and encouragement) it was possible to do that sort of thing.

'I would also timidly record my belief that there is, in fact, a much larger audience for an intimate revue composed and conducted on the scale and plan of "Riverside Nights" than many people suppose—even the rich and knowing gentlemen of Shaftesbury Avenue. There is still, I believe (and you have good reason to know) a large public which appreciates the good use of the English language as much as you do (by which, in this connection I do not mean anything "high-brow"—I mean the difference between lyrics of the Gay or Gilbertian type, and "She's my Baby" and "I want to be happy" type): and who do not want every piece of music they hear in the theatre to be a syncopated dance. There is a lot of room for the 20-30 minute light opera (to me, as you know, a very attractive form), the careful dramatic parody (taking off, or trying to take off, the *whole author* rather than one particular mannerism or play—isn't it extraordinary, for example, that no one has ever

thoroughly tackled Shaw in this manner?), and the illustrated song, which, with the help of Elsa Lanchester, Dorice Fordred, Marie Brett Davies, and others, you did so charmingly. I think that (for the West End, at any rate) there should be more social satire than we attempted. You may remember that we had a friendly disagreement on the subject: and probably, for Hammersmith, you were right. But I always feel that the revue ought to *say* more than it does, everywhere, though I know better than most people the danger of "saying" anything.

'One practical difficulty, of course, is to combine the sort of items I have mentioned with that snappy finish and generous display of shapely leg which the revue audience in general has been taught to expect. Personally, I am strongly in favour of the shapely leg, and lots of it: but it should not be the principal ingredient in any entertainment. The difficulty is that the shapely-leg-show costs a lot of money, and that the people with a lot of money would not, I fear, invest it in the "intimate revue", though they were promised the shapely leg as well. For they would label it "high-brow". Well, I can think of nothing which could reasonably be called "high-brow" in "Riverside Nights", unless it were the delightful Landor Conversation. That failed, so far as it did fail, because it was too much for the young performers. At any rate it was an experiment worth making: and if it is high-brow to use the English language wittily, naughtily, beautifully, and well, then, indeed, we are in a poor way. As a matter of fact, Mr. Cochran in his spectacular revues has done (to his credit) many things far more "high-brow" than anything in "Riverside Nights": but because he has done them in a

lavish manner, and sandwiched them between duets of the "She's my Baby" order, his audience and even his backers, have never realized that they were being made accessories to an act of high-browism. I know that someone, some day, somewhere, will make an immense success with another "Riverside Nights", and I hope it will be you—at Hammersmith or elsewhere.

'And now, with apologies, I must conclude this wandering and garrulous communication. One more word, though. I think, if I may presume to offer advice, that it is most important in this kind of entertainment, to have as few authors as possible, in order that the show, however various its ingredients, may have what I may call a "unity of flavour". And I strongly recommend that one of them, in every case, should be—

'Yours sincerely,

'ALAN HERBERT.

'12, *Hammersmith Terrace*,
'*W*.6.'

One of the admirers of 'Riverside Nights', who came several times to see it, was Sir Francis Towle, the managing director of many famous hotels and incidentally of the Metropole, where for many years he organized a supper entertainment known as 'The Midnight Follies'. That entertainment no longer exists, and I very much fear that I am largely responsible for its demise. Perhaps they were ailing before it occurred to him to call me in as consultant, and I hope, for my credit, that was the case. Be that as it may, he sent for me, and gave me *carte blanche* to present the next entertainment, making only the

Photo. Bertram Park

TCHEKHOV BURLESQUE IN 'RIVERSIDE NIGHTS'

stipulation that I should make full use of the troupe of young ladies who were constantly employed, and of Miss Elsa Macfarlane, who had already very charmingly appeared for me in 'The Duenna', and adding to them any artists I might choose. I accepted his proposition with some misgiving, but with a determination to do my very best. A. P. Herbert was to write the words, and Reynolds to compose the music, and Penelope Spencer to arrange the dances and to dance herself, and Elsa Lanchester was to sing some new songs specially suited to accompany the sounds of knife and fork and popping corks.

We were a little downhearted, I must confess, by a preliminary but only too truthful *obiter dictum* of Sir Francis at a consultation. 'You must understand, gentlemen', he said with becoming gravity, 'my audience don't care twopence about the *words* of a song, and they don't care twopence about the *music*. All they want is——' and he finished with an expressive wave of his cigar which was certainly intended to convey some immortal truth, but what that truth was we never successfully discovered nor, as it turned out, did the audience ever get what it did want, whatever that may have been.

It was quite evident from the beginning that the young ladies of the chorus thought very little of my entertainment, and they did not hesitate to express their opinion very frankly: they thought even less of the dresses designed by John Armstrong, and they danced the unaccustomed measures of Penelope in silent protest, and, though no one could say that their vocal efforts were attractive, their criticism was listened to with the utmost respect by everybody connected with the management, except Sir Francis

himself, who stuck to us with loyalty, though his faith must really have been tottering almost from the first. Reynolds' music terrified the orchestra, skilled as they were in their accustomed jazzing. The first night arrived. A few of our wealthier supporters from Hammersmith appeared to applaud, but little of Herbert's wit survived the changing of the courses. One or two critics wrote that it was the best cabaret entertainment ever devised, but few could be found to agree with them, and certainly I myself was not among the number. All the same, nearly all the items taken by themselves were good, and were a joy to look upon, and if ever I do another revue at Hammersmith, I shall have them ready made to my service. One of the best, I thought, was a ballad actually of the time of Charles II, of Puritans rebuking the gay court ladies who dance mockingly round them. But the Midnight Folly ladies were neither courtly nor gay, and the supers only wondered why they were wasting their obvious charms in long skirts. And Elsa Lanchester was altogether too exotic for that audience, and the coldness of her reception after the roses and rapture of Gower Street and the Cave of Harmony must have been a bit trying. But Elsa is a philosopher, almost a stoic, and she is now living happily ever after. Only Sir Francis, though he has never shown any resentment, must regret the day when he bowed before the false Gods of Hammersmith and the Intelligentsia. And though, in these hard times, I am only too anxious to pursue a policy of 'no reasonable offers refused', I do not think I shall accept another offer to provide a cabaret entertainment, if such affairs still continue to exist. For one thing I am not fond of sitting up late, and

central London terrifies me and, except on rare occasions, I am a very poor disciple of Lucullus. Part of my privilege during the run at the Metropole was free food and drink, and I fear the waiters must have grown to despise me, as my meals grew simpler and simpler, though I did not go to the length of a friend of mine of earlier days who, supping at the Carlton, told a bewildered attendant to bring him four slices of brown bread and butter, and some honey in the comb!

I had almost forgotten, though it should be recorded, one of the many charitable performances which I have been responsible for. It was an attempt to repeat in the same place, the large drawing-room of Devonshire House, then, alas, under notice of demolition and very dishevelled, a play specially written by Bulwer Lytton, and called amusingly, 'Not So Bad as We Seem', and acted again, as originally in early Victorian times it was, by distinguished amateurs who were also poets and novelists. In that time Dickens was the bright particular star. The title, as I say, is amusing, but the play itself is extremely indigestible stuff, and the fact that my company made anything of it at all is very much to their credit, and certainly the large audience was polite and forgiving in its appreciation. I played the game quite fairly, the only professional actors appearing being Ashton Pearse, who is primarily a writer, and Ivor Novello, who in those days composed much better than he acted, though by extreme diligence he has since then improved out of all recognition. Others in the cast were Mr. Compton Mackenzie, Mr. W. H. Davies, Mr. Alfred Noyes, the Hon. Neville Lytton, Mr. Harry C. Dickens, Sir Gilbert Parker, Miss

Tennyson Jesse, Miss Rebecca West, and Mr. Ian Hay, and an important, though silent part, was acted by Lady Oxford and Asquith, most good-naturedly and very well. She, indeed, was the life and soul of the rehearsals. Five minutes after her appearance, she was telling me exactly how a play ought to be produced, teaching Genée how to dance, and instructing actresses of long experience (for some of these were allowed 'to walk on'), in the art of make-up. I found her delightful, kind-hearted and entertaining, but she talked more nonsense about the theatre in half an hour than I have heard in a lifetime. I remember her informing me that no intelligent woman had ever become an actress, and named as the only approach to an exception two ladies, friends of hers, who have some social gifts but certainly can't act, at least not so that you would notice it.

I have, in fact, met several chorus girls with the genuine critical faculty more highly developed than hers, but no one with more charm and vitality.

Except that I am accustomed to hard knocks, with occasional intervals of being pleasantly enough patted on the back, it would be very painful to have to record that after the financial failure, though more than *succès d'estime*, of 'Riverside Nights', I found myself involved in what was, with one exception, my greatest failure, and one to which I devoted as much energy and hard work, if not more, than to any other. I refer to a translation of the immortal Molière's 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme' made for us by Mr. Anstey Guthrie, an immortal himself, fortunately, apart from this unhappy venture. Somehow or other nothing went right or almost nothing. Anstey Guthrie brought to his work all his enthusiasm, though

Photo. Stage Photo. Co.

NIGEL PLAYFAIR AND EDITH EVANS

perhaps it is true that he made a mistake in conveying his humour with too much regard to the humour of to-day or rather yesterday. The scenery and dresses by Norman Wilkinson were a remarkable reflection of the spirit of Molière's period. I contributed to the mistakes by overworking myself in playing the chief part as well as producing the play—a mistake which I cannot at least accuse myself of often making, but Mr. Anstey Guthrie made my doing so an absolute condition. And I think that the play was reasonably well cast otherwise. But the audience would have none of it, and simply stayed away from the beginning, and the loss over the whole venture was pretty devastating, and can only be very slowly made good, if at all.

Fortunately, I did succeed in following it with a considerable success in Farquhar's 'Beaux' Stratagem', the last and in many respects, I think, the best of the 'Restoration' Comedies. It is not so much, if at all, an 'artificial' Comedy, for its sentiment rings true and its wit is drawn from nature. It should have been the ancestor of a school of perfect English Comedy, but for some odd reasons it had no successor unless, after the best part of a century, Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer' can be called that. The play is gaiety and tenderness personified, and it was written by a penniless man practically upon his death-bed. That such a thing is possible at all is some comfort and a flaunting of the horror that Death tries in vain upon some of us. I know of another instance in our own time, but I cannot speak of that at this moment.

I had myself no doubt whatever of its success from the first moment when I read it seriously again with a view of putting it upon the stage, and provided that I could present it with a good cast, but I was not

agreed with. Bennett, for example, though he did not refuse the experiment being made, prophesied failure in the same breath as his announcement of his much regretted parting from us. It was not, indeed, on that account that he gave up his Chairmanship. He had stated that he would stay in that position for seven years—but no longer—and he would not change his decision. No one, I am sure, was ever more glad to find himself wrong. For 'The Beaux' Stratagem' gave the Lyric a fresh lease of life. Moreover, it finally established the reputation of Miss Edith Evans, whose 'Mrs. Sullen' was, and remains, the greatest of her performances. I have not used the word 'genius' before in this book, and I think in my own mind I use it very seldom, but there was genius in her playing of the touching little scene at the end of the first act, if I know the meaning of the word, and it thrilled the audience.

George Hayes, who, I prophesy, will one day be looked upon as the most brilliant of actors, was admirable, as was the low comedy acting of Miles Malleson in 'Scrub'. It is to my very great regret that Malleson acts so seldom, but his talent can only be properly devoted to the kind of plays which are very seldom given. It is to him and his like that I point when doubters question if a really good company can be got together to revive the glories of the classic drama.

I placed the play in a somewhat later period than that in which it was written 'for reasons', as I stated in the programme of 'urgent personal convenience'. The audience and the critics very kindly accepted the explanation without inquiring too closely into the inner meaning of it, so far as they knew it might

have any. But the truth is that I could not afford new dresses, and also my conscience was supported by the knowledge that the later eighteenth century dresses are so very much more easy to act in. It is extraordinarily difficult to be sprightly in a full bottomed wig. Also this particular play was popular many years after it was written, and was always acted in the contemporary costume of the actors.

I hope to revive 'The Beaux' Stratagem', but the difficulty is that Miss Evans is so little accommodating as to be unable to act in two places at once, and has never learned to scorn Shaftesbury Avenue.

I gave myself a very small part and, to tell the truth, a somewhat uninteresting one in the play and, as it was a very long run, I was glad to leave it for a time and play at the Ambassadors a very jolly part in my friend H. M. Harwood's play 'The Transit of Venus' with Athene Seyler. But it did not last very long.

If Athene Seyler could be bored, and so full of vitality and sympathy is she that it seems impossible, it must have been in the wings during that play, for I remember that I required the whole of her attention to explain to her the details of my next entertainment at Hammersmith, then in preparation, and to inform her what a good idea had fortunately come to me, and how it could not possibly fail to attract all London, to which assertion, from my description, she enthusiastically adhered. But it didn't, though I still think and I hope she agrees, that it ought to have. My idea, and surely it was a good one, was to assemble in a prologue, taken with a minimum amount of adaptation from 'Nicholas Nickleby', the Crummles family and troupe, and to set them to act one of the

plays which they did act, or at least, might very well have done. And the play I chose was George Lillo's 'George Barnwell or the London Merchant', which was indeed written in the eighteenth century, but still a great favourite in the provinces throughout the nineteenth, and listened to with the utmost solemnity in small travelling theatres at least up to the period of the Great War. I had evidence, too, that Dickens himself knew it well.

I engaged what seemed to me, and was generally recognized to be a splendid company, Hermione Baddeley for the 'Infant Phenomenon', Wilfred Shine for 'Crummles', Ernest Thesiger and Goolden for his two sons, and Miriam Lewes for 'Mrs. Crummles'. I think in the succeeding play I did not succeed in securing a co-ordination of style, a definite line between conscious burlesque and serious appreciation of their task, limited and made amusing by their shortcomings as artists and actors, but otherwise there was little fault to find and, I think, the discovery of an actress who, like Miss Lewes, could portray emotions of a melodramatic intensity and do a skipping rope dance was worthy of some reward. I trembled a little when I told her that she was expected to do it but, by great good fortune, she had been as a young girl a member of a troupe of acrobatic dancers—was it the Tillers? I rather think it was.

The scenery was really perfect in its period, and so were the dresses. I really believed in it more thoroughly beforehand than anything I attempted, and the laughter and enthusiasm of the first night's audience seemed to justify my hopes, though I had learned not to pay too much attention to that. But it never drew good houses and in America, where it

was produced for me, by Mr. Halliwell Hobbes on behalf of the Schuberts, its fate was even worse. It is an odd circumstance which I have never been able quite to explain, that American visitors find their way to Hammersmith, and many of them, complete strangers, visit me and tell me that New York would welcome anything I produce. But they don't. I should like to go myself and achieve their conversion, but the opportunity has not arisen and the conversion might not.

'Crummles' in spite of its short run has established itself more than any of my plays as a prime favourite with Amateur Societies, and it may be that in time it will thus repay me. In any case it is the one play which I was never tired of watching myself, and that is by no means a habit of mine; in fact, I do not bring myself to do so nearly as much as I ought to, though I am not like the manager of the neighbouring Music Hall which I visited a year or two ago. I enjoyed the entertainment so much that I thought I would knock at his door and tell him the gratifying fact. He thanked me, but added: 'I've been manager here for over twenty years, but I've never seen a show and, please God, I never shall.'

It has long been an ambition of mine, after my one experience with Beecham and 'Figaro', to stage opera on a much larger scale than is possible at the Lyric, with its obvious limitations, and, with this possibly quite unrealizable object in view, I have taken what opportunities have offered themselves to see opera abroad. Not, indeed, very often, in England, for opera in this country has up to now been seldom, I think, worth visiting. The British National Opera Company have done their best, but they were always

starved of material and resources. As for Covent Garden in the season that appeals to me even less for though it is something to hear great artists, it must be remembered that they come from distant places, and different ones, with only the smallest chances of rehearsing together. And in this way the result achieved can never be anything but unsatisfactory, at least to my way of thinking, who prefer co-ordination, a thought-out scheme, a unified design to any wonderful virtuosity. Most people, of course, don't agree with me, and I don't expect them to. It was in an expedition of this kind that I came across a mine which is in this century totally unexplored, I mean the operas of Handel.

Alfred Reynolds and I flew over to Cologne, on the advice of an anonymous correspondent, and witnessed 'Julius Caesar', most interestingly produced and perfectly sung. I have since suggested to anyone with influence that the entire company should be engaged to give a performance at Covent Garden, but I am told it would create little preliminary interest, and only please the few and perhaps it is so. Certainly it is a pity. And I must confess that very little interest was created when I arranged some scenes from it in the Foundling Hospital, just before its destruction, a place associated with Handel, who, though born a German, proudly signed himself 'George Frederick Handel of London. Gent.' Roy Henderson appeared as 'Caesar', Katherine Arkandy as 'Cleopatra', George Sheringham designed a little 'set' to harmonize with the steps of the old panelled room in which Handel himself had often been, and no one came, or scarcely anyone. But Balfour was there, and I knew he loved it, so it was worth doing.

And perhaps the spirit of Butler to show its appreciation was hovering in mid-air.

I am afraid it is painfully true that the audience for experiments of this kind are painfully small in this country, but they are growing if very, very slowly, as such purveyors as Fagan in Oxford and Terence Gray at Cambridge and Peter Godfrey under the arches in Villiers Street can bear witness. But even in these more or less exotic haunts, it is the play with a reputation already made, say at the Atelier in Paris, that really 'draws'. At the little Gate Theatre, for example, 'Maia' brought packed benches, but 'The Twelve Thousand', a far better play, was comparatively a failure. And Oxford does not support its little theatre as it deserves. I must not complain for Oxford is very kind to me, and I have visited it every Eights Week for many years. Lately, I have added Cambridge. It is an odd psychological fact, which is undoubtedly true, that Oxford provides a far more enthusiastic audience than Cambridge, twenty times quicker at seizing upon 'points', and more prone to applause at the end of scenes, though less restless during them. I cannot attempt to explain it, except that I think Cambridge men are much more interested in what they do themselves than what other people do for them—that they are rather exhibitioners than scholars, if you know what I mean. Hence the multiplication of Amateur Acting Societies in their midst, while Oxford is reasonably content with one. But perhaps, after all, I am prejudiced, though, as I have sent one son to Oxford, and am sending the other to Cambridge, I cannot be accused of being very violently so.

After 'When Crummles Played' I turned again to

music and the eighteenth century, which in combination have never failed to bring profit and honour to the theatre. Yet on this occasion, and I seem to be embarking now on too lengthy a tale of woe, they did. The fault certainly did not lie with the music, or with the altogether charming decorations by Sheringham in the Rowlandson manner, but most probably in the lack of humour and the weakness of the pretty story, and that too much of the support of the plot, such as it is, is given to a tenor hero, and that is always a fatal mistake. 'Love in a Village' contains perhaps the loveliest song, and that is saying a good deal, in all the ballad operas. 'My Dolly was the fairest Thing'—but as a whole the plot is poor—Goldoni and water—not to be compared, for example, to the same author's 'Lionel and Clarissa'. Yet in its day it was immensely popular, and I thought that the cause of that popularity would be revealed during the performances. Also Ranalow had once more a part to suit him, and Rose Hignell was a charming heroine. But village life is no longer to the taste of Hammersmith, perhaps she has too lately escaped from it, for I have talked with Hammersmith men who can babble of green fields growing up to the boundary of the present Broadway. At the same time I did achieve a charming ending, which was the equal of the ending to 'Lionel and Clarissa', where I made all the characters fade away in a ghostly dance to the accompaniment of a clavichord only. In 'Love in a Village' Ranalow, the old bachelor disappointed in love, is left alone on the stage, with only his faithful red setter for his comfort. The effect was really touching and beautiful, but, alas, it did not come off on the first night, and the failure may have made a

Photo. Bertram Park

NIGEL PLAYFAIR AND ROSE HIGNELL

IN 'LOVE IN A VILLAGE'

serious difference to the success of the play. For the red setter, an admirable actress afterwards with a real sense of the pathetic, on this occasion decided to make a determined and disconcerting effort to join the vanishing and selfish revellers, and the curtain descended amidst the wrong sort of laughter, instead of the right sort of tenderness and tears. But it never happened again.

In spite of that, it never occurred to me then, or for some time after, that 'Love in a Village' would fail to follow the example of all our other eighteenth century plays and operas, which really are the only form of subsidy the Lyric possesses.

'Love in a Village' was followed by a few months' season of the Old Vic Company, who were temporarily homeless, with Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson specially engaged to strengthen them and, on the whole, they were successful, though they attracted really large audiences only at the beginning. But neither they nor we were losers by the venture, though, as I have said before, Shakespeare for some reason does not really seem to appeal to my audiences.

CHAPTER XII

YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

I HAVE arrived very nearly at the present day, and I propose to deal shortly with the productions that followed the Old Vic Season.

There were at least three plays which I was determined at some time to present, Sheridan's 'The School for Scandal' and 'The Critic', and Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer', bearing in mind, as I do, that my attempt, if it is worth anything at all, should be a dim reflection, a miniature shadow of the work which in happier times may be done by a National Theatre.

'The School for Scandal' exists, as far as I am concerned, only in the planning, but the designs for the other two I have carried out, and with at least so much success as to prove, what really I have never doubted, that there exists a large public that desires to see them honestly performed and periodically presented.

As it happens 'She Stoops to Conquer' was given by me at an impossible time of the year—in August—and a very hot August at that, and yet from the first its performances were very well attended.

I may be forgiven for once—for it has not been a fault of mine—if I make a long quotation in dealing with 'She Stoops to Conquer', for 'The Times' dramatic critic, whom I must not, I suppose, strip of his anonymity, writes so fairly and so well, and expresses so much of what I should have liked to say myself, had I been capable of it, that I cannot resist the temp-

tation. Only, and here I confess to my poverty rather than my will consenting, the scenery and the costumes which he gently complains of, had indeed done service for Sheridan, and I made use of them—and I agree some misuse, because I could not afford anything specially designed for what I anticipated would be only a very short run.

'Sir Nigel Playfair, like all good artists, has a manner, a style of his own. It is charming, it is gay, it is full of spirit, but it sits a trifle oddly on Goldsmith. On our very own Goldsmith, that is, though on Sir Nigel's it sits, no doubt, comfortably enough, for Goldsmith, thank heaven, is a writer upon whom there can be no absolute and general judgment; it is the peculiar merit of his immortality that each man is able to forget it in a personal affection. And therein lies a danger to criticism. Seeing a play which you happen to love better than any other, you are apt to be over-critical of another man's treatment of it, forgetting that the scenes which have played themselves over and over again in the theatre of your own imagining, and have established therein what you have come to regard as an ideal tradition, have been played also in his, and been loved by him, shaping themselves in his mind to a different, but perhaps, as legitimate, ideal. All Goldsmith's ground is highly personal. Each of us is tempted to believe that he has bought the freehold with his affection. There is a danger of treating good and pious travellers as if they were committing a trespass.

'Sir Nigel, though we may disagree with him by the way, is a delightful fellow-traveller, and we have not for a long while better enjoyed an evening than this spent in his company. For all that he has a habit

of treating Goldsmith as if he were Sheridan, almost as if he were Congreve, which is profoundly disconcerting. That "old-fashioned house" of Mr. Hardcastle's, which was so like an inn—did it shelter so many airs and graces, such a foppery of manners? Did Miss Hardcastle fall so easily into sophisticated poses? Were the servants whom Mr. Hardcastle prepared for the reception of his guests quite so decorative, so highly coloured, as they now appear to be? And the corner of the garden near the horse-pond—are not the plaster cherubs, who seem from their figures to be representative of Tony Lumpkin in early youth, a little too conspicuously formal? The play's great charm has always been to us that Goldsmith's own character seems to look out from it—a character that was neither formal nor foppish but easy and good-humoured, that was, above all else, refreshingly free from affectation, from the kind of affectation which, in a different drama, gives a glitter to the twisted sophistications of cuckoldry. But let it pass. Sir Nigel has seen a different Goldsmith, and is entitled to his own humour.

'Happily the effect of it, though it is indeed disconcerting at first, wears off as the play proceeds—or dare we say that Goldsmith prevails over it? You forget the adornments in the character, the gilding in the gold, for, granted the dominant mood to which all the acting is attuned, the acting is admirable. Sir Nigel's own Tony, with an accent broader than Burnley, is a rich, lively fellow; Mr. Ronald Simpson's Hastings is brilliant in flashes, and Mr. Aherne's Young Marlow a steady, consistent, and delightful portrait; Miss de Vaux's Mrs. Hardcastle, though extravagant to the brink of farce, is at any rate of an

original colour, and Mr. Hay Petrie as her husband is full of sly tricks and grave drollery. But it is Miss Marie Ney's Miss Hardcastle that is the evening's grace—a really distinguished and beautifully varied performance to which her song is an added delight. She may not be our very own Miss Hardcastle; she has for that too much of the guile and polish of the town; she also must be obedient to the performance's highly decorative mood, but she obeys it with bewitching spirit.'

He was quite right about the Garden Scene. It was makeshift and thoroughly bad makeshift at that. After the first performance I made what turned out to be the highly successful experiment of playing the escapade of Tony and his Mother in complete darkness. It shattered one of the conventions of stage technique, that laughter, except for a moment or two, cannot be evoked by voices from a void—shattered it completely indeed, for I have never known any comic scene in any play go so well, and in the future I most strongly advise any producer of 'She Stoops to Conquer' to follow my example in this respect; and hereby hangs a tale, and a rather strange but true one. It so happened that some of my friends on the tenth anniversary of my management were so kind as to wish to present me with my portrait, and left me to make choice of an artist. I chose that great painter Sickert, but with the intention that he should carry out a work very modest in size, for his fee would not be a large one. Nor did I really in the least want a painting that should primarily be a portrait of myself. I hoped for a picture in his 'Old Middlesex' manner of the Lyric, with perhaps a little me standing upon the stage. But Sickert would have

none of this. First of all he would not accept a fee, but asked the kind contributors to forward what they had collected to the Sadler's Wells fund. Then he said he would paint a life-size portrait of me in one of my 'great' parts. I told him that I did not go in for any such things, but he reminded me of 'Tony Lumpkin', and told me that he had particularly liked my appearance in the garden, which scene (oh Mr. Sickert!) he assured me he had witnessed with enthusiasm at least seven times! But alas for the frailty of human and artistic veracity he could only have 'witnessed' it, for reasons which I have explained, on the first night and he certainly was not seen there by anybody! In any case, that was the portrait he was determined to do, and no other, in spite of all my protest, and he had a snapshot taken of me *sans* paint, *sans* wig, and in an odd pair of top boots which was all I could find. I implored him to remember, for I was to give no further sittings, that I wore bright red curls, and a real schoolboy complexion, and he promised, but promised vainly, that he would. This is the true story of the Sickert Picture, an amazing piece of craftsmanship which I value and admire, but really I hope no one will think it represents me as 'Tony Lumpkin'. Not that it matters! And it does most satisfactorily represent me, in my own character, trying to imagine where the next quarter's rent is to come from.

Two things I did in regard to this production which are worth setting down, just in case any producer of the future thinks it worth his while, as I confess I always do, to make researches into the records and experiences of the past. I spoke (as 'Tony') Craddock's Epilogue, which is given in most of the

text books as an addendum, but has never, so far as I know, been made use of upon the stage before. It was written by Craddock, who was a great friend of Goldsmith's, for the original production, but arrived too late. That is the story, though possibly the leading lady insisted on having one of her own. In any case it is dramatically far more effective than Goldsmith's, which bears evidence of haste and little enthusiasm in its composition. Then also I introduced Goldsmith's perfectly charming song which he intended Miss Hardcastle to sing, but was obliged to omit because the original exponent of the part had no singing voice. Luckily Miss Marie Ney had, and the picture of her sitting at the harp and singing it in all probability was the effect in my production which led largely to its success, and which is least likely to be forgotten. As this song cannot easily be found, and is not in any edition of Goldsmith's plays, it may be of interest to my readers if I print it here:

WHEN SHALL I MARRY ME?

Ah me! When shall I marry me?
Lovers are plenty but fail to relieve me.
He, fond youth, that could carry me,
Offers to love, but means to deceive me.

But I will rally and combat the sinner,
Not a look nor a smile shall my passion discover;
She that gives all to the false one pursuing her
Makes but a penitent, loses a lover.

Ah me! When shall I marry me?
Lovers are plenty but fail to relieve me.
He, fond youth, that could carry me,
Offers to love, but means to deceive me.

'She Stoops to Conquer' drew crowded houses for

some twelve weeks or so, and then its audiences suddenly became exhausted. That is the inevitable end, and, I suppose, perfectly natural rule with the revival of a classic, but it left us with a very comfortable little addition to the exchequer; and it served again very successfully in Oxford and Cambridge in the following summer.

It was succeeded in its turn by Sheridan's Comedy, 'The Critic'. As in 'She Stoops to Conquer', I removed from the production all the 'gags' with which for many years, perhaps almost from the beginning of their career, it had been disfigured. This policy, again for the benefit of future producers, is, I believe, the only sound one with regard to established classics. It is possible, of course, to conceive that an able comedian may at rehearsals remind an author of a missed opportunity in retort, it may have happened in the case of both Goldsmith and Sheridan, and they in turn, though approving of the addition, may not have cared to set it down in their text. I do know and acknowledge one or two 'gags' that are definitely amusing, raise honest laughter and help to lighten, even to illustrate, a situation. But they are rare, very rare, and generally they are the obvious products of inferior minds and the only safe rule is to prune them away remorselessly. And this rule especially applies to theatres where performances are given for definitely educational purposes. I may be a prig, but it horrifies me, it really shocks me, to think that to this day such gags—relics of barbarism—are permitted at Stratford-upon-Avon, and I consider it the duty of the governors of the Memorial Theatre definitely and categorically to forbid them.

Moreover, I have proved to my perfect satisfaction

Photo. Stage Photo. Co.

NIGEL PLAYFAIR AS TONY LUMPKIN

that the plays go just as well—no, I think even better when they are omitted, and I speak now from a long and wide experience. I have acted in all these plays in the old Benson days, using all the recognized interpolations and I recall the wild shrieks of laughter when as 'Tony' I have said in answer to my mother's 'I that fed you with a spoon', 'Well, you wouldn't want to feed me with a shovel!' But these very shrieks drag the true comedy on to a false level, and so the sin is avenged. And even the most famous 'gag' of all in 'She Stoops to Conquer', 'So Constance Neville may go to the Devil', I found in the end was better done without. More than likely it was thought of by the original 'Tony' at the first performance or before —more than likely—Goldsmith, that good-natured man, allowed it. But—and here is the point—it is far more effective to let the audience—thinking itself oh so clever—see the temptation of the gag—read it in the actor's face as he says, 'So Constance Neville—may go—wherever she pleases'. The effect is infinitely better. In 'The Critic' the rule is even more necessarily to be insisted upon, since from the epoch of 'benefit' performances it has been so ridden with the inventions of famous clowns and funny men as to have become unrecognizable, and here again, though the wiseacres told me it would not be so, I find its own fun and that of its author quite satisfying enough. I also found, though I do not claim it as a discovery, that its first act, though different altogether in quality, is as good if not better than its second more famous one. It is also much easier to manage. In the second 'Puff', who starts as such a vivid and admirable character, is metamorphosed into a muddled dullard, so much so that I personally cherish the belief that

'Puff' was not originally intended to be the Author of the Tragedy at all, but was made so from some sudden fit of economy on Sheridan's part. Then it is frantically difficult to draw the line between the serious acting and conscious burlesque. It is quite easy to say to the actors, 'just do it as well as you can, and as if you believed in it and the ludicrous nature of the situations will do the rest', but this system if applied to 'The Critic' simply will not work, for Sheridan himself is not logical. Some Tomfoolery on the part of the actors must be allowed; the trouble is to find out just how much will serve. And the wretched producer must certainly not, in this instance, go on his holiday after the first night; he must watch it constantly—he is required nightly in his seat like a musical conductor. I must say on the whole that my company, especially James Dale as 'Puff', Marie Ney, who has the sure gift of burlesque that must have been possessed by Lady Bancroft, Clarke-Smith and Ruth Taylor were very good. And there was no doubt of the appreciation of the audience—of this Lyric, Hammersmith Audience. The theatre was full every night, and I began to regret that it was to be produced for three weeks only, at the end of which time I was committed to 'A Hundred Years Old' by the brothers Quintero. And I yielded, as I should not have done, to a suggestion that I should transfer it, together with Herbert's 'The Two Gentlemen of Soho' to the Court Theatre, in the hope that it would survive those few difficult weeks before Christmas, and then be played triumphantly to all the children of the Intelligent, home for their holidays. It turned out to be a fatal decision. Whether everybody who wanted to see 'The Critic' had come

in that three weeks, I do not know. It is odd, if it was so, for usually if I run a play for six months, people say to me, 'Oh, why are you taking it off? I haven't had a moment to see it yet.' And again, if I announce it for three weeks, there is an obvious suspicion that I can't think it really much good. Whether people who are willing to come to the Lyric, Hammersmith, hate the Court I do not know, and there really is no reason why they should, but come to the Court they most decidedly would not, and we lost not only all the money, and it was quite a large amount, that we had made during our three weeks, but a good deal more besides. By Christmas it was dead, and no treatment could make it awaken from the grave.

Meanwhile the brothers Quintero, though not with the same play, and though they are probably far too proud and grand to be aware of the fact, had exactly the opposite experience. My friend Mr. Amner Hall, just before this period, produced two of them at the Court, which the public treated with sublime indifference, but 'A Hundred Years Old' did quite reasonably well with me, considerably better in any case than any other translation from the Spanish that I can remember, though 'The Romantic Young Lady' has been a firm favourite in the smaller repertory theatres. But here we have an example of that quite extraordinary absence of curiosity as to the foreign theatre, which can only be broken in England by a sudden fashion, as, for example, for Tchekhov. I should like to see, for the cure of insularity, the betterment of international relations and eventual release from the curse of Babel, an International Theatre in our midst, where the best

foreign plays could be continually given. It seems at the moment a far-fetched idea, but eventually it will, I think, come about and successfully, and I commend it to some energetic young man or woman with some capital behind them. And, of course, if the Government were wise they would sell a few submarines for its endowment, if necessary.

It was during the run of 'A Hundred Years Old' that upon one Sunday evening, a surprise party was given for my wife and myself, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of my management at the Lyric. It was a very remarkable evening, for the list by this time is distinguished and lengthy, and by great good fortune most of them were able to come. Herbert and Austin and Reynolds arranged a wonderful entertainment, but, to tell the truth, not indeed through any fault in it, but because of the emotions of the moment, my thoughts were inclined to wander from it. But I did pay attention to the 'surprise' item—the announcement that Arnold Bennett was to sing a song to his own accompaniment and a comic song at that. Hardly anybody believed it was really going to happen—you must remember, that nothing like it had ever happened before, that Arnold has never even once been persuaded to return thanks for Literature.

His impersonator was guessed at, but it was he himself and no mistake. He advanced to the footlights, announced with dignity (so far as I can remember) 'I'm going to make a d—d fool of myself', and then didn't. On the contrary, though the accompaniment was simple it was soundly constructed, he missed no point, and his singing voice was good enough to secure him, at least, an engagement in any chorus.

Moreover, and that is rare with singers, he knew what his words meant, and gave them every possible point.

I felt upon this evening, that I should have liked to have announced my retirement from active management, that ten years of the constant strain and anxiety is enough for any man, as indeed it is, and I would willingly hand the theatre with its goodwill to a younger man. But, for one thing, I am not certain that I can earn a living elsewhere, and also I felt I had still some things to do, and one of them was certainly to fulfil a promise I had made to myself, to reawaken an interest in the compositions of Offenbach, to whom I owed so much pleasure, and who, except in the minds of the elderly, was now little but a name. I do not pretend that I had, that I have even now, a complete knowledge of his works, not even that I could boast a critical appreciation of them. I mean, merely, that I had an affection for his best known airs, a sympathy with the feelings of the period in which they were written and loved, and that I do not think that the pleasures of the past, if they are sane and healthy, should be allowed, if possible, to die. I did not suppose, when I visited his tomb and looked at his quizzical face, that he would have reciprocated the kind interest that I took in him, but even that did not deter me. The main difficulty of a revival, or an attempted revival, were the libretti. For though I understand that even in England the jests of Meilhac and Halévy had their enthusiastic admirers, their number would certainly not be increased by a literal translation, and they are pretty well dead in their own country. I chose 'La Vie Parisienne' because it contained one or two airs

which I liked particularly, especially the valse, but principally because of its name. I thought to myself that it is the one French phrase which every Englishman knows, and therefore could appear unaltered upon the bills. I am not sure that I was right about this, because it suggested to a good many people that the entertainment itself was French, and would be given by a French company, and on this account alone I believe a great many people stayed away. My second reason was that it was one of the few operas which was intended to be performed in contemporary dress, contemporary that is to say, with the date in which it was written, and my third that most of the characters could easily be English. In the original they were indeed South American. The plot, too, lent itself to the particular humour which is supposed to be liked by the English at the moment, the poking of fun at their propriety in the immediate past, a propriety which they are supposed, or suppose themselves to have shed in the present enlightened age. As a matter of fact they had less than they pretended, and now they have more, that is all the difference I can see between the two periods.

Having settled on the play and the plot, the next thing was to find an adapter, and several promising dramatists struggled through the very long libretto, but found it less promising than they were themselves. One or two produced samples, but they did not read very inspiringly. At last Davies Adams, to whom the task of arranging the music had been entrusted, produced a version written by himself, a version which was at least workmanlike in shape. I took it to A. P. Herbert, who undertook to collaborate with him, but at my particular request, he did not read the

original French work at all. And so the thing came into being.

My next difficulty was with the cast, and especially to find the principal lady who had to be very, very French. I went over to Paris and interviewed several very charming singers, but although they all, in turn, politely agreed to come, they all, terrified at the rigours of the English climate, ended by writing letters either in deep mourning to announce the death of their grandmother, or on silver-edged notepaper to break the news of their own forthcoming marriages. And all the time, for we were undergoing another few weeks of the now unmentionable 'Beggar's Opera', Miss Kathlyn Hilliard was in the theatre, and from some overweening modesty, was concealing from me the fact that she had been born and brought up in France, and spoke French like a native.

I handed the scenery and dresses to be carried out by Miss Yootha Rose, a young lady who had sent me a portfolio of drawings to look at. When she arrived to interview me, it turned out that she was a chorus girl in a travelling revue company, and had never had a drawing lesson in her life. Nevertheless, they were a great success and much admired.

The play was a great deal of trouble to rehearse, the more so as the acting and movements of the very small chorus were all-important, but in the end the result seemed satisfactory, and the first night audience most enthusiastic. But whether it was the time of the year, the exceptional heat, Wall Street, the Labour Government, or what not, though a great many people came to see it, they never came in sufficient quantities to make it a paying proposition. I ran it for six

months, always hoping that autumn would bring its usual, if not inevitable, reaction, but it did not.

My next little enterprise did not help the situation very much. I suppose I may call it a *succès d'estime*, but there were very few esteemers, though some of them were fervent enough. It was a revival 'for three weeks only' of Henley and Stevenson's 'Beau Austin', together with 'The Comforter' by Laurence Housman, the most charming of whose little political sketches, 'The Queen—God Bless Her!' I had recently produced at the Arts Theatre Club. That particular play was, however, forbidden under some silly rules of the Lord Chamberlain (it shows how little the nation cares, as a whole, about the theatre, that such a rule is quite patiently suffered), and I do realize now that Disraeli is a possible figure for the stage, but Gladstone somehow is quite unbelievable!

I took the two plays first to Scotland, where they were regarded, speaking generally, with considerable indifference, though there was a certain tempered enthusiasm among the stalls people in Edinburgh.

Here, though it was well acted, especially by Marie Ney, the critics, or, so it seemed to me, completely misunderstood the reason for its revival. I wanted to show the delight that to some people style and rhythm can give, not to expose the poor frail thing as a problem play! But as a problem play most of them would treat it, and being for the most part middle-aged and extremely respectable gentlemen, they were terrified lest anyone should think that they could be in sympathy with the condemnation of seduction and elegant trifling of that kind, and spent their whole articles in expostulation at Henley and Stevenson's attitude towards a problem which they never attempted

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WITH THEIR SONS, GILES, LYON, AND ANDREW

seriously to consider. That's how it struck me, but then one does get irritated with critics when the box office isn't working, and I daresay it had nothing whatever to do with it. My mistake arose from believing that if a play interested me, it would also interest a three-quarter audience for three weeks. If my premises were correct, a play like 'Beau Austin', with a small cast and a cheap production would pay for itself in that time. But my premises were not correct. I am beginning now to wonder if some organization of subscription is not necessary to ensure the continuance of a theatre devoted to such productions as we undertake at the Lyric.

And here I bring this book to a close, but not, though it may sound like it, on a note of pessimism. That would be unfair to my supporters, unfair even to myself.

I have at least proved that there is a large audience for sane entertainment, and for the best things in drama. I have proved also that its provision is a large task for a small organization to carry through unaided. Revision of taxation and some modest assistance from a wise government would go far to removing difficulties. If I have made out a case for that, I shall feel that my life and work will not be found to have been altogether a failure.

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